

No 79.

**FAME**

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**FORTUNE WEEKLY.**

**STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.**

**A CHASE FOR A FORTUNE ;  
OR, THE BOY WHO HUSTLED.**

*By A. SELF-MADE MAN.*



The train was pulling out of the station as Clifford Price darted out on the platform with Fleming and Monkton at his heels. "Stop him! Stop that boy!" roared Monkton. Cliff darted for the last car and swung himself aboard.



# Fame and Fortune Weekly

## STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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# A CHASE FOR A FORTUNE

OR,

## THE BOY WHO HUSTLED

By A SELF-MADE MAN

### CHAPTER I.

#### THE HEIR OF BEECHING HOLLOW.

"Look here, Clif, aren't you the heir to this property?" asked Walter Singleton, looking at his chum very seriously.

"That's a singular question for you to ask, Walt," answered Clifford Price, in a tone of surprise. "Don't you know I am?"

"Well, I always thought you were, of course, since your mother died; but I heard your cousin, Howard Fleming, make a remark to one of his cronies the other day that set me thinking."

"What did he say?" asked Clif, with more than usual earnestness.

"He said that when you came of age you might find considerable difficulty in proving your right to inherit this property."

"He said that, did he?"

"Yes."

"I can't see what ground he had to make any such remark."

"Neither do I."

"My father bought this property many years ago, and expended considerable money improving it. When he made that unfortunate trip West which cost him his life this place had more than doubled in value."

"I believe your mother's brother, Edward Fleming, accompanied your father on that trip," said Singleton.

"He did. But Mr. Fleming was only a half brother of my mother's. However, I know she always thought a great deal of him, and placed implicit confidence in him."

"She must have, for when he brought back the news of your father's death she practically put him in charge of this estate."

"Well, she really wasn't able to look after it herself. She never was the same after father's death. She grieved constantly up to the hour of her own death a year ago," replied Clif, soberly.

"I understand that your father left everything to your mother."

"That's right."

"And your mother died without making a will?"

"No will was found. It may, however, still be in existence, for Mr. Goodrich, father's lawyer, said he drew one for her, making me her sole heir. It doesn't matter, as Mr. Fleming did not put in any claim for himself. The court appointed him my guardian, and he gave bonds for the faithful discharge of his duties."

"Mr. Fleming evidently regards you as the rightful heir."

"Of course. I don't see why he shouldn't."

"Then why should his son make such a peculiar remark?"

"That's what puzzles me."

"He must have some reason for it. He spoke in such a significant way that it instantly attracted my notice."

"Howard and I don't pull very well together, so I dare



say he'd like to see me done out of this property. But as the law clearly makes me the chief heir of my mother without a will, and as Mr. Fleming, who is her only living relative, has waived his claim to any part of this estate to which he may have been entitled, I can't see what is to prevent my coming into possession when I reach my majority."

"Nor I," replied Singleton.

"Well, let's drop the subject. How are we going to amuse ourselves this afternoon?"

"Suppose we go up to the Crow's Nest, taking a rope with us, and explore the Devil's Chimney. I'm just in the mood for such an adventure, and we might find that red pocketbook, with the valuable diamond ring in it, accidentally dropped down there last summer by Mr. Fleming."

"I'm with you, Walt," replied Clif, with some enthusiasm. "I like anything that has a spice of danger in it. There's a long stout rope in our barn that will be just the thing for us to use. I'll go and fetch it and meet you at the gate."

"Hold on a moment," said Singleton, as Clif started off.

"Well?" answered Price, stopping.

"Maybe we'd better not do it."

"Why not?"

"I remember now that we were going to try and find that pocketbook soon after Mr. Fleming dropped it and he forbade you to make the attempt. In fact, if I remember rightly, he ordered you to keep away from the Crow's Nest altogether. He said it was too dangerous a spot for you to go to. The Chimney is a matter of 200 feet deep, and he said a misstep might cost you your life. I don't want to encourage you to go contrary to your guardian's wishes."

"Pooh! I'm a year older now, and able to look out after myself. I've always wanted to investigate the inside of the Chimney, and this afternoon is as good a time to do it as any other, if you're game to go with me as you proposed."

"I'm game, all right, only——"

"Don't you worry about me going contrary to Mr. Fleming's orders. He gives a good many orders that he hasn't any business to do. With a strong rope of good length, well anchored around the base of the scarred pine tree near the mouth of the Chimney, there isn't any particular danger to a pair of stout chaps like us, who are used to the rugged slopes in this neighborhood. Didn't we climb up the Witches' Ravine a few weeks ago, without any rope at all? When I told Mr. Fleming about it he never made a kick, although in many ways it's a great deal more dangerous than the Chimney with a rope to rely on. Mr. Fleming rather encourages these expeditions of ours, with the single exception of the Chimney. He's so violently opposed to that as to make me all the more eager to go there, if only to prove to him that we can go all through it without getting a scratch."

Singleton made no further objection.

As a matter of fact he was only too anxious to explore the recesses of the Chimney.

The boys had been about everywhere in the rugged range of picturesque mountains which surrounded in horseshoe shape the village of Macedonia where they lived.

Both were good looking, courageous lads, of eighteen years.

Strong-limbed, active as cats, and with muscles hard as rock, acquired by constant exercise at outdoor sports and rugged expeditions among the mountain slopes and defiles, they were as well fitted to attempt the exploration of the famous Devil's Chimney as any mountaineer, almost.

Hitherto the boys had refrained from tackling the Chimney on account of Mr. Fleming's injunction to the contrary.

He told Clif that he could not afford to permit the heir of Beeching Hollow to risk his life in any such madcap adventure.

What would people think of him, he said, if he did so and anything serious happened to the boy?

As the property would by law revert to him in case of Clif's death, would not gossip spread about ugly insinuations as to his object in the matter?

Of course it would, and his reputation was bound to suffer.

Clif would have appreciated the apparently friendly interest in his welfare shown by his guardian but for the fact that Mr. Fleming made no objection to his expeditions to the Witches' Ravine, nor to several other wild and dangerous spots in the range.

He could not quite understand just why Mr. Fleming put so much stress on the Chimney, and yet placed no prohibition on the other places.

It was singular, to say the least, and it set the boy to wondering whether his guardian didn't have some special reason, which he did not care to disclose, for wishing to keep him away from that particular part of the mountain.

The loss of the red pocketbook had caused Mr. Fleming a good deal of perturbation, and he had made many attempts to recover it from the recesses of the Chimney.

Time and again he had taken a man up there with a strong rope ladder and had made the descent himself to various depths in an unavailing endeavor to find his precious wallet.

He had given out that the diamond ring it contained was not only valuable, but a priceless heirloom whose loss he regarded as a great misfortune.

At the same time he discouraged the efforts of any outsider to look for it, on the ground that he regarded the search as altogether too dangerous, and because he claimed that he alone knew just where to hunt for it and hoped eventually to find it.

To still further dissuade a search, he refused to offer any reward for its recovery.

Although Clif knew that his guardian would be angry with him for making any attempt to penetrate the mysteries of the Devil's Chimney, even if he were so lucky as to find



the pocketbook with its precious contents, yet he was nevertheless determined to go there some time.

Therefore he greeted Walter Singleton's suggestion with avidity, and entered into the expedition that afternoon with the utmost enthusiasm.

Hardly had the two boys left the place where they had been conversing, which was close to the hedge that partially walled in that section of the garden in the front of the Beeching Hollow mansion, than the head of another boy rose above the well trimmed green border and looked after them.

This boy, who had been hiding within earshot of them, was Howard Fleming, Clif's cousin.

He was a lad whose arrogant disposition and disagreeable manners had rendered him as unpopular with the servants of the place, as well as the boys of the nearby village of Macedonia, as Clifford Price was the reverse.

He was not at all good looking, and in many respects was a sort of pocket edition of his father, Edward Fleming.

He was instrumental in bringing charges against most of the old servants with a view to their dismissal, but had failed in his object owing to the vigorous protest of Clif, which carried considerable weight, as Mr. Fleming, for reasons, did not care to antagonize his ward—at least not at that time.

Consequently there was no love lost between Clif and Howard.

The latter hated his bright, handsome cousin all the more on this account, though he was bitter enough against him on general principles—the chief of which was that Clif was the heir to Beeching Hollow.

Recently, however, Howard seemed to have other views concerning his fortunate cousin, and these views afforded him a great deal of secret satisfaction, so much so that he had been betrayed into making the singular remark to a particular friend of his which Walter Singleton had accidentally overheard.

As he stood looking over the hedge behind which he had been for some time concealed, there was a sardonic look on his bilious countenance.

"So, you heard what I said to Ned Barker, did you, Walter Singleton?" he glowered, with an ugly frown, "and you've repeated it to Clif Price. Well, much good may it do both of you. It's the truth, all right. You'll never come into this property, Clif Price, if my father can help it, and I guess he has the scheme almost cut and dried that will put a mighty big spoke into your wheel. Yah! I hate you! I'd like to see you dead and buried in your family vault. Never mind, my turn is coming. One of these days I'll own this place instead of you. Then you'll be working for a living, like you ought to do, while I'll be living on the fat of the land. That will be a glorious satisfaction," and the youth's face wrinkled into a disagreeable smile, and he rubbed his hands together after the fashion of his father. "You two chaps are going up to the Devil's Chimney, eh? I must tell my father at once. I know what you two can do with the help of a rope. You

can go anywhere in that place, for you're as sure footed as the chamois of the Alps. If you weren't you'd have broken your necks long ago in the Witches' Ravine. Father and I have looked to see you do it, for it would have simplified matters for us, but we've been disappointed, worse luck. Father will be right at your heels when I tell him you've gone to explore the Chimney with a rope. Oh, if it wasn't for that red pocketbook, which it might be just your luck to find, neither of us would move a finger to prevent you exploring the Chimney as often as you wanted to. No, no, we'd only be too glad to have you do it, trusting to a loose stone, or an insecure crag, to wipe you both out, for I hate you, too, Walter Singleton, and I'll have revenge on you yet for the whipping you once gave me for interfering with Bessie Byron, who isn't your girl, anyway."

Howard Fleming hurried away to find his father.

The gardener however informed him that Mr. Fleming had just gone to the village on business.

"How unfortunate!" exclaimed Howard, to himself, with a nervous frown. "What's to be done now? Those chaps are on their way up the mountain by this time. If they should happen to find that pocketbook, and look into it for the diamond that isn't there, they would be apt to discover—I can't bear to think of it. The only thing I can do is to follow them myself and see what happens. They may not find the wallet, the chances are against their doing so, but you can't tell what may happen when a fellow has so much luck as Clif Price. At any rate I'll watch and if they should find the pocketbook——"

Howard's face looked absolutely wicked as he mused and shook his fist in the direction of the mountains, then he rushed into the house, went to his room, and after a few minutes came downstairs again, and darted off in the direction taken a short time before by Clif Price and his friend Singleton.

## CHAPTER II.

### SENT TO HIS DEATH.

"The finest view in the State is to be had from this spot," said Clif to his chum, as they stood on the summit of Crow's Nest and looked around them.

"You're right. That's why a good many tourists come here at this time of the year," replied Singleton.

It was a clear, sunshiny afternoon in the month of July, and all nature was robed in her summer attire.

On one side, three or four hundred feet below the spot, lay the village of Macedonia, with Beeching Hollow a mile up the horseshoe curvature.

A mile or more in the opposite direction, on a line with the two mountain spurs, could be seen the railroad station, on the C. & N. W. trunk road, one of the big American systems connecting the East with the West, and with connecting branches at a dozen points to take one either north or south.



The mountain range, of which the horseshoe at Macedonia was the southwestern terminal, could be made out winding away to the Great Northwest in a series of elevations of varying height.

The boys lived in one of the most picturesque regions of the United States, and they fully appreciated the scenic advantages that were theirs.

Almost at their feet was the yawning fissure in the range which went by the name of the Devil's Chimney.

It was about two yards in width and perhaps three in length, at the opening, and it was of unknown depth, though commonly rated at 200 feet, because it had been probed that far with a line and sinker.

There was a sheer drop of thirty feet from the mouth to the first ledge, but beyond that there appeared to be numerous, though precarious, footholds as far down as one could see.

The Chimney was known to contain many little caverns, in which adventurous villagers had at one time or another found old stone weapons and rude utensils of some aboriginal tribe that had lived here in ages gone by.

One of the reasons why Clif and Walter wanted to explore the Chimney was because they hoped to secure some of those curiosities for their private museums.

The boys wasted little time in admiration of the landscape, for they were perfectly familiar with it from every point of view.

"That's a long line you've got there, Clif," said Singleton, as his friend threw the coil on the ground. "How far do you think it will reach?"

"A hundred feet," replied Clif. "That's as far as we shall want to go this afternoon."

Walter agreed with him, and they then proceeded to tie one end of the thin but strong rope around the trunk of the solitary dead tree that grew near the brink of the crevasse.

"That will hold all right," said Singleton, after both had pulled on it with all their might. "Now to prevent it fraying on the rocks at the edge of the Chimney, we'll fold up both our jackets and lay it across them."

This was done and then Clif, taking the lead, swung himself over the edge of the chasm, and slid down to the ledge, ten yards below.

"Come on, old fellow," he sang out to Singleton.

Walter looked down, and seeing that all was clear for him to follow, swung off and was soon standing beside his friend.

Clif kicked the slack of the rope into the depths of the Chimney and was looking for the easiest way to continue to descend when his chum stopped him.

"Let's look all around here first for that red pocket-book," he said.

"All right," answered Clif. "You take the first try and go to the left. Then I'll go to the right when you're done with the rope."

Every part of the narrow ledge, and all the fissures round

about, were carefully inspected for the missing wallet, but they didn't find the least sign of it.

"If you're ready we'll go on down and try to find one of those caverns," said Clif. "I'll lead the way, and don't you crowd me. We'll have to step from crag to crag very carefully. There's a big bunch of bushes twenty feet or so below. We'll have to avoid that as we go down."

"Say, Clif," said Walter, as his chum was about to resume his downward course, "what's this thing sticking in a crevice a couple of yards below us?"

"Whereabouts?" asked Clif.

"There," answered Singleton, pointing with his finger. "I give it up. I'll have to swing off, slide down and look at it."

He did so, and hanging in mid air, he put his hand into the crevice in question and withdrew—the missing, but badly weather-stained, pocketbook.

"Hurrah!" shouted Clif, waving his hand and the wallet at his chum. "I've got it."

"Not the red pocketbook?" palpitated Walter in some excitement.

"Yes, the red pocketbook."

His triumphant exclamation reached other ears than those of his chum on the ledge above.

Howard Fleming had reached the mouth of the Chimney a few minutes after the two boys had gone down.

He saw the rope stretching from the tree and over the pair of carefully folded jackets, into the depths of the chasm, and he knew that his cousin and Walter Singleton had begun the exploration of the crevasse.

Crawling to the edge of the opening he peered down and saw the boys searching the vicinity of the ledge for the wallet.

He knew that was what they were up to by their conversation.

"It won't be well for either of you if you find it," he gritted between his teeth, while his eyes glared balefully. "I'm not going to have father's scheme spoiled and all my own chances destroyed, not if I can help myself."

He watched Clif and Walter till they gave up the hunt, and then he breathed easier.

"They can't find it. Good. I didn't think they would, for father has searched every inch down there more than once. Now they're going further down. If Clif only would lose his hold, fall and break his neck he would be doing a good thing for me. I don't expect any such luck, however. They'll look out for themselves, and as long as they hold on to this rope they're safe enough, I'll be bound."

At that moment he heard Singleton call Clif's attention to the object sticking in the crevice below.

Howard's face turned a chalky white and his breath came thick and fast.

Had they discovered the location of the wallet at last?

His bulging eyes followed Clif's descent and he saw him reach for the object in question. Then he heard his cousin's gleeful cry, and knew instinctively that Clif had hold of the lost pocketbook.



Almost beside himself with rage, Howard glared down and saw Cliff swinging in the air with something in his hand.

"Yes, the red pocketbook," came up his cousin's words as plain as anything he had ever heard.

"He's got it! He's got it! We'll be ruined when he opens it and finds out what's inside," hissed the young rascal, shivering as with the ague. "Oh, if the rope would only break. If it only would——"

He stopped suddenly as a terrible thought flashed through his brain.

Why shouldn't it break if he wanted it to?

He had a sharp penknife in his pocket.

It would be an easy matter to sever a couple of strands, the rest would unravel under his cousin's weight, and then—

And then, nothing could save Cliff.

Without dwelling upon the fiendishness of his contemplated crime, Howard tore the knife from his pocket, opened it and hastily began to saw the rope.

He looked around stealthily in a sort of guilty panic lest some one might come unobserved upon the scene and detect him at his terrible work.

He might have saved himself that trouble, for there was no one other than himself and the two boys below within a mile of that airy spot.

As he worked away with his knife he glanced down again, for he felt the rope shiver.

"He's coming up hand over hand," he muttered. "He'll soon be safe, and the truth will come out. I must hurry."

He bore heavily on the blade of the knife.

It had already penetrated one strand and was half through another.

Now it went through the second.

It is doubtful if his evil work was not already accomplished, for it looked as if the line was straining at the severed section to the breaking point.

So desperately in earnest was he that he couldn't stop and trust to chance.

He made another vicious cut with the blade.

With a sharp snap the rope suddenly parted.

A terrible, despairing cry came up from the depths, followed by the sound of a body striking against some spot and bounding off again.

This was followed by a soft thud and a heavy rustling, and then all was quiet save for Singleton's horrified exclamation:

"My heavens! The rope has parted and he has gone to his death!"

### CHAPTER III.

#### IN THE DEVIL'S CHIMNEY.

His terrible purpose accomplished, Howard Fleming lay upon the ground shivering from fright and excitement.

His rage against his cousin seemed to melt away and he began to repent of his deed.

"I wish I hadn't done it," he whispered to himself. "I wish I hadn't done it. I can't get that awful cry out of my head, and that thud of his body against the rocks. It will haunt me, I know it will. What a fool I was!"

He didn't dare to look down lest he should see the lifeless form of his cousin on some ledge a hundred feet below.

He could hear Walter Singleton bewailing the loss of his chum in grief stricken tones, and blaming himself for suggesting the adventure for the afternoon.

At length Howard raised himself on his knees.

His knife dropped from his nerveless fingers and slipped under the jackets.

He never thought to look for it—in fact its presence seemed to have escaped from his seething memory.

And yet even at that fateful moment a certain spark of cunning asserted itself.

As he looked at the severed end of the rope, and saw the clean cut edge, it occurred to him that the condition of the rope was incompatible with the presence of the jackets on the edge of the hole, and he drew the jackets back, thus burying the handle of his knife out of sight, so that it might appear that the rope had been severed by friction against the rock.

It was a crafty move, but in working it out he only dug a pitfall for himself that was to bring the guilt of the transaction home to his guilty soul.

His open knife, with particles of the hairs of the rope sticking to it, and with his initials engraved on the handle, lay unthought of under the clothes.

Trembling and unmanned, he rose to his feet, and with a shuddering glance at the mouth of the Chimney, he reeled from the spot.

In the meantime, Singleton, after bemoaning the loss of his chum, and peering down into the crevasse for some sight of his body in vain, began to consider how he was to get out of the Chimney and return to Beeching Hollow to tell the bad news.

The rope having been severed at the brink of the opening, he was completely cut off by a wall of rock thirty feet high.

There was no way of scaling it from any point.

It was far easier to go down into the depths, dangerous as that feat was, without anything by which he could steady himself.

But of what use would that be?

He would only be putting himself deeper in the mire.

Even if he could go clear to the bottom, two hundred or more feet below, he could not tell if there was any way out to any other part of the range.

What then was to be his fate?

Was he doomed to perish of starvation in that spot?

It was extremely uncertain when anybody would come to the mouth of the Chimney.

Unfortunately, they had not told any of the servants



whither they were bound, and when they were missed their whereabouts would only be a matter of conjecture.

They had been repeatedly warned by Mr. Fleming to stay away from the Chimney, therefore it was scarcely likely, except as the last resort, that the place would be visited by those sent in search of them.

The Witches' Ravine would undoubtedly be visited first, and then other glens in the range.

When the search party did come to the Chimney, Walter asked himself if he would still be on the narrow ledge.

Thus an hour passed slowly away, the sun declined in the west, and still Singleton stood moodily watching the creeping shadows gathering around the upper part of the Chimney.

Suddenly he heard a sound from below.

It went through him like an electric shock.

He could have sworn that it was the voice of his chum whom he had given up for dead.

"Hilloa! Are you there Walter?"

"Great Scott!" cried Singleton, "It's Clif! That's his voice. Can it be that his spirit is calling to me from the depths to come and meet him?"

"Hilloa! Hilloa! Walter!"

It was a very life-like hail—not at all like a ghost.

"My gracious! That is surely Clif's voice. Can he have escaped after all?"

He sank to his knees and peered down into the depths of the Chimney.

"Hello, yourself!" he shouted. "Are you there, Clif?"

From a spot but twenty feet below came back the answer.

"Yes. I'm down here in the bushes."

Walter looked in that direction and saw his chum's face, streaked with blood, sticking right out of the mass of bushes that projected from the inner side of the crevasse.

"Are you badly hurt?" asked Walter, in a tone of much concern.

"No, I don't think so," replied Clif.

"That's good," said Singleton, thankfully.

"Can you come down here?" asked Clif.

"I'll manage to do it somehow," returned his friend.

Slowly and with great caution he made his way down to the edge of the bushes.

"Shake, Clif," he said, earnestly. "I never was so happy in my life before as I am to know that you're alive after that fearful fall you had."

"I've been wondering just why I am alive myself," replied Clif, with a faint smile. "These bushes broke my fall, and pitched me into a kind of cavern behind."

"Is there a cavern there?" asked Walter, in some astonishment.

"Yes."

"How are we to get out of this place?" inquired Walter with a rueful look.

"You mean out of the Chimney?"

"Yes."

"Well, we can't very well go up, so I suppose we must

go down instead, and try to find our way out. I've got hold of about eighty feet of the line, from the point where it broke."

"It's curious how it came to snap off. It seemed strong enough when we both tested it. Do you suppose it snapped close to the tree?"

"No, I don't. It would have been frayed at the end if it had. It looks just as if it had been cut through by a sharp knife. Look," and Clif held it out to him.

There was light enough down there for Singleton to examine the severed end of the rope.

"It does look as if it had been cut by a knife. Our jackets must have slipped somehow and a sharp rock probably did the damage. It parted on the edge of the opening."

"How do you know?" asked Clif.

"By this paint stain which I noticed when I placed our jackets under the rope."

"Then it must have been the rock that did it."

"That's the only way I can account for it. But it is a remarkably clean cut. I don't see how a rock could do this without fraying the edges."

"Well, no use wasting our time in useless surmises. I nearly got my quietus, and very thankful I am that I escaped a terrible death."

"Well, I'm dead glad you got off so easy, Clif. I never suffered so much in all my life as I did during the last hour. By the way, how about that pocketbook? I suppose you dropped it down the Chimney."

"No, I didn't. When I came to my senses a little while ago I found it in my hand. I had a kind of death-grip on it. It's in my pocket."

"Mr. Fleming ought to be very grateful to you for recovering it for him."

"I suppose he will; but he'll give me a lecture, I dare say, for risking my life up here against his express commands."

"We are whistling before we are out of the woods. We may not be able to get out of the Devil's Chimney at all, especially if we go down to the bottom. No one knows where the end of this crevasse leads to. It may go right on into the interior of the range, or it may stop a hundred feet or so below. I think it would be better to stay up here, and trust to our being found by those who are bound to go in search of us."

"I don't know but you are right, Walt. It is rather a risky venture to go on downward without having the least idea where we are likely to fetch up at. Well, step into these bushes. We'll take a look around this cavern behind me and see what's to be seen. We might as well do that as anything else."

Singleton agreed with his chum, and stepping into the bushes sank up to his armpits in the yielding mass.

"Now, follow me," said Clif, sinking out of sight.

Walter did so, and found himself in a hole that was as dark as the fabled caves of Erebus.



## CHAPTER IV.

## THE WAY OUT.

As they expected to explore some of the caverns that opened off of the Chimney crevasse the boys had come prepared for that purpose.

Each had a small collapsible dark lantern, that could easily be carried in their pockets.

These they produced and lighted, and with the slide drawn back, throwing a two-inch bull's eye circle of light, they started forward to investigate the subterranean hole in the mountain range.

It extended about one hundred feet straight ahead, and from its general aspect it looked to the boys as if human hands had assisted nature's work by enlarging it to its present size.

There was nothing in the shape of aboriginal curiosities to be found.

Previous visitors had cleaned out whatever in that line might have been there once.

At the extreme end was a pile of debris, where a portion of the roof had caved in.

"I guess we can't go any further," said Clif, flashing his lantern over the pile of earth and stone.

"No, we're blocked," replied Singleton. "I don't believe there was any more of it anyway. The rear of the cavern has simply fallen in."

"It seems to be the general idea in this neighborhood that a tribe of ancient Indians lived in these caves," said Clif.

"I guess they did. This cave shows plenty of evidences of having been enlarged by rude tools."

"They must have been a tribe of what are known as cliff dwellers."

"That's right. Those Indians lived in holes, hollowed out of cliffs and high bluffs."

"I wonder how they got in and out? They must have been as sure footed as mountain goats."

"Perhaps they used ladders made out of strong vines, plaited together."

"Maybe they did. They must have had something of that sort to get up and down that thirty-foot wall of rock above the ledge that we struck first."

"That's reasonable, for no human being could crawl up that place unless he had a pair of wings."

"I'll bet he couldn't. Now if they had tools with which they could enlarge this cavern, why couldn't they have cut a back entrance from here to the top of the mountain? It's only fifty feet at the outside."

"They probably could have done so if they had wanted to real bad. But I've always heard that the average red-man was a lazy fellow, except when on the chase or the war-path. The women did all the manual labor."

"Well, if the women enlarged this cave they might have bored a way out upward, which would have greatly simplified entrance and exit."

"I suppose they didn't want to do any more of that kind

of work than they could help," said Singleton. "What seems to us a reasonable way of doing things might have been regarded as quite superfluous by the cliff dwellers. They were accustomed to crawling down the face of the rock on the outside, and what they were used to, naturally had the call with them."

"There doesn't appear to be anything left in the way of native curiosities," remarked Clif. "We'll have to go to some of the lower caves to find something of that kind."

"I guess we will," replied Walter; "but I'm not as interested in them as I was before our way to get back to the surface above was cut off."

"I can't say that I am either. I'd like to be sure of getting back to the top of the mountain. I wish I knew some way of getting there."

"I'm afraid our chances at present are rather slim," replied Walter. "It will be dark soon, and that will mean that we'll have to stay here all night, if not longer. I wouldn't kick about going without my supper, though I am beginning to feel quite hungry, if I had good reason for believing that we would be able to get out in the morning."

"It isn't impossible that a searching party may be up this way after dark. At any rate we'll be on the lookout for anything in that line. In the meanwhile let us dig this rubbish over to see if we can find any curiosities under it. It will be a good way to kill time."

Singleton agreed, though without much enthusiasm, and the two boys began to pull the heap of debris to pieces.

And while they worked they talked about the chances of a rescue from their peculiar situation.

"I don't believe there's any use monkeying with this pile of stuff any more," said Singleton at length. "There don't seem to be anything here but stones and dirt."

As he uttered the words Clif, in reaching for a good sized stone, lost his balance and his arm shot clean through the hill of debris.

"There must be a hole there," he said, as he recovered his feet. "Help me to clear the way to it."

Singleton took hold again and the boys soon uncovered a dark, tunnel-like excavation, running upward.

"You wait here, Walt, and I'll crawl up and see where it goes to," said Clif, as he got down on his hands and knees and disappeared into the hole.

Flashing his bull's eye lantern about he crawled ahead up a gentle declivity that seemed too natural to have been fashioned by the hand of man.

"Looks to me as if an underground mountain stream ran through here once upon a time," he said to himself.

He found places, however, that showed the impress of rude tools, as if its width had been increased to correspond with the rest of the tunnel.

"I really believe this passage was used by the Indians as a back entrance to the cave. If so I may be able to find the outlet somewhere near the top of the mountain," said Clif, as he pushed expectantly forward.

The passage took a sudden turn to the left after he had



penetrated a matter of sixty feet, and a moment later he found the end blocked up.

As his heart sank with a thrill of disappointment he discovered that it was merely a mass of bushes that lay before him.

The obstruction was so thick, however, that it cut off all the rays of light from the outside.

Clif took out his stout jackknife and hacked away at the stuff until after forcing his way through the first barrier he began to see light shimmering through the underbrush.

At last the hole ended abruptly and he found himself in a dense thicket.

Rising to his feet he found, with a sense of great thankfulness, that he was actually in the outer air, somewhere at the top of the mountain.

His first impulse was to continue his progress to complete freedom, but the thought occurred to him that in such a complex mass of dried vegetation he might lose track of the mouth of the underground passage, and thus be unable to return to his companion with the good news.

He was sorry now that he had not suggested to Walter to follow him instead of remaining behind in the cave.

There was nothing for him but to return and lead Walter up to the egress.

So he pushed his way back into the passage, and hurriedly retraced his steps.

He found Walter impatiently awaiting his return.

"Where have you been so long?" asked his chum. "I was just about to come after you and see whether some new misfortune had happened to you."

"I wish you had followed me, for nothing but good luck attended me."

"Good luck, eh! What do you mean by that?" asked Singleton, curiously.

"I mean that this passage leads right to the top of the mountain."

"It does! Hurrah for that! Let's lose no time getting out then."

"Come on."

Clif started off leading the way, and ere long came to the bushy obstruction.

They pushed through it into the thicket, and thence forced their way to the clearing beyond.

"Glory hallelujah!" cried Walter. "How good the air feels!"

It was just sundown, and they calculated that it would be dusk by the time they reached the valley once more.

"Let's get our jackets and go," said Clif. "Yonder is the mouth of the Chimney."

They made their way there, and saw the end of the severed line lying upon their clothes.

"I don't see how our jackets could have slipped back so far from where I placed them," said Walter, looking down at the folded pile in some perplexity.

"Nor I," answered Clif, looking down and picking his jacket up.

Singleton followed suit and then both boys saw Howard Fleming's open knife.

Walter picked it up.

"That doesn't belong to me," he said.

"It isn't mine," said Clif. "It looks like my cousin's."

"Your cousin's!" exclaimed Walter in some surprise. "What is it doing here?"

"Ask me something easier," replied Clif.

"It is your cousin's," said Walter. "Here are his initials on the plate. Say, look at those fibers on the blade," he added suddenly.

Clif looked at them, and then the boys glanced at each other.

The same disquieting thought had struck both on the instant.

Singleton stooped down, snatched up the end of the rope and examined it.

"I hate almost to say what I think; but it seems to have been cut by something sharper than a rock."

He got down on his hands and knees and carefully looked the edge of the rock over.

There wasn't a single fiber of rope clinging to it.

"There isn't a sign of the rope having been frayed by the rock," he said with solemn earnestness. "What do you think about it, Clif?"

"I'd rather not say," replied Clif, with a chill of horrible suspicion at his heart.

"You don't think that your cousin followed us up here and deliberately cut this rope at the moment you were hanging to it, do you?"

"No, I can't believe that he would be guilty of such a crime," said Clif, with a shudder.

"Well, perhaps not; but I never liked nor trusted Howard Fleming, and there is not a particle of doubt but your death would be of great advantage to him."

"How?"

"Why his father would succeed to the Beeching Hollow property, and in due time Howard himself might expect to become its owner."

"I never thought of that," replied Clif, in a hushed tone.

## CHAPTER V.

### FATHER AND SON.

Slowly and almost silently the two boys walked down the mountain side to the valley below.

Neither was in the humor for conversation.

Clif never had such food for thought in his life before, while Walter was quite as busy figuring up the situation.

It was almost dark by the time they reached a side gate on the Beeching Hollow property.

"Well, old man, I'll see you to-morrow," said Singleton, with very little of his customary cheerfulness.



"Come over early, Walt. I may want to have a serious talk with you," replied Clif.

"I'll be over at nine," was the reply, and then the chums parted.

As Clif was passing close to one of the partly open windows or the sitting-room he heard his name mentioned in the room by the voice of Howard Fleming.

Curious to learn if he was the subject of the conversation going on inside between his cousin and Mr. Fleming, Clif stopped and listened.

After what had happened at the Devil's Chimney, the boy was anxious to find out whether or not Howard Fleming had really cut the rope for the purpose of sending him to a sudden death.

"What's that you say?" he heard Mr. Fleming exclaim in an agitated tone. "Clifford Price has fallen down the Devil's Chimney?"

"Yes, father," replied Howard, tremulously. "He did."

"How do you know?" demanded Clif's guardian, pausing before his son, and gazing sharply into his face.

"I saw him."

"You saw him fall!" cried Mr. Fleming, who had only just returned from the village. "You actually saw him fall?"

"I did."

The gentleman received the information with some doubt.

"How came both you and Clifford at the Devil's Chimney? I have repeatedly warned him to keep away from that spot, and he is not a boy that usually disobeys my commands."

"Walter Singleton induced him to go there to hunt for your lost pocket-book."

"Ha! Indeed!"

"As soon as I found what they were going to do I looked for you to let you know about their intentions. When I learned that you had gone to the village I determined to follow them to the Chimney to see what luck they would have."

"You did right. So Singleton accompanied him, eh?"

"Sure he did. They go everywhere together."

"Well?"

"Clif got that long rope out of the barn that you used for the same purpose."

"He did?"

"Yes. They tied one end of it around the dead tree and then slid down to the ledge, where they hunted for awhile without finding the pocket-book."

"I am not surprised, for I now believe the wallet went all the way to the bottom."

"That's where you're wrong."

"Eh?" in surprise.

"It didn't go to the bottom, but was caught in a hole half a dozen feet below the ledge."

"How do you know that?" asked Mr. Fleming in a startled voice.

"Because that's where Clif found it."

"Clifford found my pocket-book a few feet below the ledge?" exclaimed Mr. Fleming incredulously. "Why, I have examined the Chimney walls to the depth of at least sixty feet and saw no sign of it."

"You must be near-sighted, then for Clif discovered it right away."

"Are you telling the truth, Howard?" asked his father in an agitated tone.

"I am, for I saw him find it."

"Where were you at the time?"

"Flat on the ground at the mouth of the Chimney, looking down."

"Did the others know you were there?"

"They did not," replied Howard, with a look of satisfaction. "I took good care that they didn't."

"Go on."

"Clif was hanging to the rope when I saw him pick the wallet out of the crevice and hold it up to Walter in a triumphant way. I knew then that something would happen as soon as he opened that pocket-book and looked into it. He would find a paper which in his possession would queer all your plans to get possession of the fortune that rightfully belongs to him. As your loss would be mine as well, I was mad with rage. I wished that something might happen to him then and there. I wished the rope would break——"

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Fleming feverishly.

"Well, the rope did break."

"What!" gasped Clif's guardian.

"And Clif and the pocket-book disappeared down the crevasse like a shot."

"My heavens!" ejaculated Mr. Fleming, the perspiration breaking out on his forehead. "Then he is dead."

"He is dead all right," answered Howard, catching his breath, "and we are—safe."

"How came the rope to break?" asked Mr. Fleming, looking hard at his son. "It was an unusually stout line which I procured with especial reference to strength, because I intended and did trust my own life to its tenacity in the Chimney."

"Clif's movements while hanging to it probably caused the rock to cut into it until his weight snapped it in two."

"But you were there. Didn't you notice that the rope was becoming frayed? You ought to have warned Clif."

"Ought I? If he had escaped the secret of the pocket-book would have come to light, wouldn't it?"

"I didn't think of that," breathed Mr. Fleming, wiping his face with his handkerchief.

"Well, I did. I considered it my duty to you to see that Clif did not learn the truth. We should have been ruined."

There was silence in the room for a moment or two, and the boy outside under the window listened eagerly for the conversation to be renewed.

"Howard," said Mr. Fleming in a changed tone, that trembled in spite of his efforts to steady it, "did that rope break of itself, or did you——"



"Did I what?" replied Clif's cousin, in a choked voice.

"Did you make it break?"

"How could I make it break?" the boy asked doggedly.

"You might have worked it back and forth against the sharp edge of the rock."

"With him hanging to it?"

"Or you might have——"

"Might have what?"

"Cut it."

"Do you take me for a fool, father?" replied Howard, almost sneeringly.

"No. Your words and actions prove otherwise. I take you for a smarter boy than I thought. You say you wished the rope to break at that particular moment. Well, what is the inference? You needn't answer me. I have my own opinion. Since Clifford has gone to his death we will not discuss the means by which he met his fate. We will, of course, look upon it as a most lamentable accident which cut short the career of a promising boy in its bud. Much as I deplore his loss, I cannot but feel that it was for the best."

"Sure it was—for us," replied Howard, flippantly.

"Death often comes like a thief in the night to rob us of our most cherished friends," continued Mr. Fleming, without noticing his son's ill-advised remark. "We are here to-day, and to-morrow we are gone to that bourne whence no traveler returns. It is very sad to think that a noble boy——"

"Oh, drop it, father," said Howard, impatiently. "What's the use of trying to pull the wool over my eyes? I know you like a book. I've helped you to get rid of an obstacle in your path. Instead of talking nonsense you ought to be thanking me for my efforts in your behalf. The only unfortunate part about the matter is that the pocket-book went down with him. We shall never be able to recover it now. The paper which is of so much importance in locating a fortune is lost for good now, and all we shall have is this property, which isn't so very valuable when compared with what it was expected that Clif might inherit."

Mr. Fleming made no attempt to reprove his son for his disrespectful language, but walked up and down the floor several times without speaking.

At that moment the hall door bell rang in the kitchen entry, and a few minutes afterward the servant announced a visitor to see Mr. Fleming.

"Who is it, Jane?" asked the acting master of the house.

"He said his name was Elliot Monkton, sir."

"Who?" gasped Mr. Fleming, turning almost white to the lips.

"Elliot Monkton, sir."

"What's the matter, father?" asked Howard, observing the strange effect the name had on his parent.

"Nothing," replied Mr. Fleming, hoarsely. "Show the gentleman in, Jane. Howard, I shall have to ask you to retire. I have private business with this man."

## CHAPTER VI.

### MR. FLEMING'S VISITOR.

Howard, in obedience to his father's command, left the room.

Nevertheless he was determined to overhear the interview if he could do so, for his curiosity was raised to the highest pitch.

The partly open window suggested the means of accomplishing his object.

He ran out of the side door and hastened to the desirable spot.

Clif heard his approaching footsteps when it was too late to make his retreat unobserved, and he crouched down in the bushes, hoping that Howard would pass on.

Instead of which his cousin came directly toward him.

There was no way to avoid the meeting, so Clif rose up suddenly right in front of him, hoping that the surprise would enable him to get out of the dilemma.

The effect produced was more than Clif had calculated on.

The moment Howard's gaze rested on the dimly seen features of the boy he believed he had murdered than he staggered back with a low cry like that of a hunted animal.

Then he threw his arms wildly into the air and fell forward on his face in a swoon.

Clif bent over him and saw that he was quite insensible.

"The shock of seeing me was too much for him," said the heir of Beeching Hollow. "A guilty conscience is its own accuser."

Clif raised him in his arms and carried him around to the side porch and propped him up against the trellis work.

"The evening air will revive him in a little while," he said. "I dare say he took me for my ghost. I'm afraid the little rascal won't get half what is coming to him. To think that he would deliberately try to murder me so that his father, and eventually himself, might succeed to my property! I never suspected that my guardian had designs against me before. Will my life be safe in Beeching Hollow after this? I'll have to talk the matter over with Walt. I'm in a mighty serious predicament. It's not such a fine thing to be heir to property when other people covet it. I want nearly three years yet of my majority. A whole lot of schemes can be worked against me in that time. However, forewarned is forearmed, they say. I shall be well on my guard after this."

Clif returned to his former post under the window because he instinctively believed that he would hear something more about himself.

The visitor had been introduced into the sitting-room and had taken the chair near the window lately vacated by Howard Fleming.

"Well, Mr. Fleming," he remarked with a short laugh, "aren't you glad to see an old friend like me?"

"What brought you here, Elliot Monkton?" was Mr. Fleming's reply.



"A lack of ready money. There you have it—short and to the point."

"What have I got to do with your financial condition?" asked Clif's guardian a bit uneasily.

"A great deal when it happens that I look upon you as my banker," replied Monkton, coolly.

"Your banker!" ejaculated Mr. Fleming.

"Pre—cisely. My banker."

"I owe you nothing, sir."

"Don't you?" with a sarcastic laugh. "What a shockingly bad memory you have, Edward Fleming. Now, on the contrary, I have a good memory. For instance I recollect with remarkable clearness a little job I did for you in the expert penmanship line—a bogus will——"

"Hush! Would you ruin me, Elliot Monkton?" cried Mr. Fleming.

"Not at all. It's the last idea in my mind to injure the goose that is able to lay an occasional golden egg for my benefit."

"I see your object. You propose to blackmail me," said Mr. Fleming, bitterly.

"Blackmail you! That's an ugly word. Suppose we boycott it. I merely called upon you to solicit a loan as I am hard pressed for means to meet life as a gentleman should."

"Do you call yourself——"

"A gentleman?" interrupted Monkton. "Sure. Why not? By the way, my throat is dry. It was a warm afternoon. Why don't you offer me a glass of something and a biscuit. A good cigar would also be gratefully appreciated by yours truly."

Mr. Fleming pushed an electric button in the wall.

A trim maid presently made her appearance in answer to the signal.

"Go to the liquor safe," he said, handing her his bunch of keys, "and fetch a decanter of whiskey. Bring two glasses and a plate of biscuits."

The maid bobbed and left the room.

"Here is a cigar," he added, taking one from his vest pocket and offering it to his visitor.

"Thanks," said Monkton, accepting it, biting off the end, and then striking a match on the sole of his shoe.

He was soon puffing the weed with great satisfaction.

Nothing more was said until the maid brought the whiskey and crackers.

"Help yourself," said Mr. Fleming, shortly.

"Thanks. I will. I never was bashful about helping myself to anything within my reach."

"I believe you," replied Mr. Fleming, dryly.

At that moment a bell rang in the corridor outside the dining-room.

"I suppose that means dinner," said Monkton. "I won't detain you. I can wait here till you are through. I've had mine."

"No," replied Mr. Fleming, "I'd prefer to finish this interview at once."

"Just as you please," replied his visitor, nonchalantly.

"What do you want?"

"I told you—money."

"I was under the impression I had paid you well for executing that will and attending to such other matters as the death of Grantley Price made necessary," said Mr. Fleming, coldly.

"I won't deny it. You did the right thing then. But you see when a man is strapped charity begins at home. It is human nature to press an advantage when you have it at your beck and call. I aided and abetted you to commit a felony. We are both in the same boat. My end of the boat looks shaky, so I look to you to see me through."

"And suppose I refuse? What then?"

"What then? Why you wouldn't be so foolish as to refuse."

"No? You have no real hold on me. Your word alone against mine would amount to nothing in court or out of it."

"That's right," replied Monkton cheerfully. "I knew that from the first, so I provided against it."

"How, may I ask?" asked Mr. Fleming, sneeringly.

"What became of the real, genuine, simon-pure will drawn by Grantley Price, leaving everything of which he died possessed to his son, Clifford Price, with a life interest only to his wife, who I understand has since died?"

"Why, it was destroyed, of course."

"It was—I don't think," laughed Monkton.

"What do you mean? I saw it destroyed with my own eyes. Do you think I was a fool to take any chances with it?"

"Well now, I had an idea that that will was in my possession."

"In your possession!"

"Pre—cisely. In my possession."

"You must be crazy."

"Not that I am aware of," returned Monkton, blowing a cloud of smoke from his lips, and then flicking a bit of ashes from his trowsers.

"Look here, Monkton, I can't see what you're getting at. You were in the room and saw me apply a match to the original will. Together we watched it burn until it was reduced to a charred mass. You know that as well as I do."

Elliot Monkton laughed.

"I believe I had the real will in my possession for a whole night for the purpose of imitating Mr. Price's signature on the bogus will."

"You did. What of it?"

"This much. As I always keep an eye to the windward—meaning that I never lose sight of my own interest in any transaction I engage in—I took the precaution to make an exact copy of the original will, and sign it with a facsimile reproduction of Grantley Price's name. This I afterward returned to you in place of the original, and you destroyed it exactly as you say you did. I kept the real will thinking that you might recognize its value when



"I got hard up. Well, I'm hard up now. I have called to get a loan on the strength of the original will. There, you have the whole matter in a nutshell," said Monkton, complacently.

"You scoundrel!" hissed Mr. Fleming, livid with anger and fear.

"Thanks. Hard words break no bones. At the same time I think the word fits you even better than it does me. A man who will endeavor to thwart the last wishes of a dead man, to the ultimate injury of that man's heir, merits a pretty hard name, don't you think?"

"After all this story of yours seems preposterous," said Mr. Fleming, after a moment's thought. "You will have to produce the will to convince me that you have spoken the truth."

"I can do that."

"When?"

"Now."

The one little word gave Mr. Fleming a cold sweat.

## CHAPTER VII.

### MONKTON MAKES A PROPOSITION.

Mr. Fleming took a turn up and down the room.

Finally he paused in front of his visitor.

"Let me see it," he said, sharply.

"All right," replied Monkton. "I'd prefer though if you'd go on the other side of that table. Just out of reach, you know. I'll hold the document so that the light from the lamp will shine full upon it."

"So you won't trust me?" gritted Mr. Fleming.

"Well, I always like to be on the safe side, especially in so important a matter as this. You might have a fit, or something of that sort, when you see it, and people do strange things under such circumstances."

Mr. Fleming glared at his visitor and then went to the other side of the table.

"Thanks," said Monkton.

He put his hand in an inner pocket and drew out a legal looking paper.

He opened it and held it up to the light.

"Are you satisfied?" he asked, quickly returning it to his pocket.

"I am—that you are a soulless rascal. I treated you squarely, now you turn on me."

"I haven't done a thing but ask you for some money."

"How much do you want once and for all for that paper?"

"That document is not for sale—at least not yet," replied Monkton, throwing the butt of his cigar into the cuspidor.

"Your purpose then is to subject me to a steady drain at such intervals as suit your purpose."

"My purpose at present is to raise a loan on this paper

of one thousand dollars—the security, however, will remain in my hands."

"You talk as if I was made of money," said Mr. Fleming, angrily. "I am not the owner of Beeching Hollow, nor have I any right to touch a cent of the funds in bank except for the good of the young heir."

Monkton pulled on his moustache reflectively.

"It's two years since I drew that bogus will for you. It's about time, isn't it, that you made some use of it?"

"I've made all the use of it I could. I filed it as Grantley Price's last will and testament in favor of his widow."

"I don't mean that. Of course, you had to do that. But as I suppose you prevented the widow from making any paper devising this property to her son, or destroyed such a document if she did make it, it's about time you started to dispossess the heir by bringing forward evidence to show that he was not the real son of Mr. and Mrs. Price, but adopted by them in his infancy. You remember you told me that was your little game."

"I did not intend to do that until he was twenty-one."

"Why not?"

"I had my reasons. However, it doesn't matter. The necessity has ceased to exist."

"Has it? How is that?"

Mr. Fleming bit his lips, for he saw he had made a rash admission.

"Oh, it's nothing," he hastily replied.

Monkton looked at him with a peculiar expression.

"After all this property is a mere bagatelle compared with the turquoise mine discovered by Grantley Price on his Arizona ranch, the title to which you have probably long since recorded in your own name," he said, with a cunning look.

"Unfortunately I have not yet recorded it," replied Mr. Fleming.

"Oh, come now, you can't expect me to swallow that," answered Monkton, jeeringly. "I prepared a forged deed of that ranch for you. All you had to do was to go to Tucson and have it recorded. The property and the mine became yours. You are not a man to dilly dally with such a fortune as that."

"I might have done, it is true, but I deemed it prudent to wait until my half-sister, the widow, died. I judged she could not long survive her husband."

"Even so," said Monkton, cheerfully. "Mrs. Price has been dead a year. You have had lots of time to do the business."

"I admit it, and intended to file it within a month after her funeral."

"Well, didn't you?"

"No."

"Why not?" asked Monkton, with a mixture of astonishment and incredulity in his tone.

"Because I lost the deed."

"You lost that deed?"

"I did. Together with the paper describing the location of the mine."



"What are you giving me, Fleming? Do you think I'm a softy?"

"I'm telling you the truth. I had them in a red pocket-book that I always carried about with me. One day I was up on the mountain yonder with a party of friends showing them a deep crevasse called the Devil's Chimney. I took out my pocket-book to get a card when one of the ladies jostled my arm and the wallet dropped into the yawning hole. That was a year ago. Since then I have made several ineffectual attempts to find it. Now you know why I did not file the paper."

"How deep is the hole?"

"It is known to be about 200 feet."

"Isn't there any way of reaching the bottom?"

"I guess it could be reached with the help of a rope long enough."

"It would pay you to get such a rope and send an expert climber down on the chance of finding your wallet. That turquoise mine is worth a million if it is worth a cent, judging from what Price told me about it before he died."

"I have no doubt that it is very valuable; but without those two missing documents it is lost to me. The forged conveyance I could, I suppose, replace with your assistance, for you prepared the other. Still, it would be of little use unless I had the paper describing the mine's location."

"It looks to me as if I'll have to take a hand in its recovery," said Monkton. "I'm a pretty clever hand at mountain climbing. We'll get a 200-foot rope, and I'll go down into that hole and search for your pocket-book, provided, of course, that you guarantee me a suitable reward."

"What do you call a suitable reward?"

"A quarter interest in the mine."

"You don't ask much."

"Isn't it worth that for me to find your pocket-book? Besides, you shall have this original will. I'll throw that into the bargain."

"I'll consider your proposition. Come here to-morrow morning and you shall have my answer."

"All right, Fleming, I'll be on hand. In the meanwhile I'll touch you for a hundred, as a sort of guarantee of good faith. When I restore you your pocket-book I shall want \$500 more. Then we'll go to Tucson together. You can record your conveyance, and make out another to me for a quarter interest. When it is in my hand the will is yours, and I will never worry you any more. I think I've made you a very fair offer."

"You shall have the hundred dollars, and we'll probably come to an agreement to-morrow. I will get the money for you in a few minutes."

Mr. Fleming left the room and in five minutes returned with the bills which he handed to his former confederate in crime.

"Thanks. You'll see me in the morning."

Monkton rose and Mr. Fleming saw him to the front door, after which he went to his belated dinner.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### WHAT CLIF FINDS IN THE RED POCKET-BOOK.

Although it was now eight o'clock in the evening, and Clif hadn't had anything to eat since he ate a light luncheon at one, the boy did not feel hungry.

The discovery of his guardian's duplicity, and the knowledge that his cousin had deliberately tried to murder him that afternoon, depressed him to such an extent as to rob him of his usually healthy appetite.

As soon as he saw that the interview between Mr. Fleming and his visitor was over, he entered the house by a side door, hoping to escape observation, and went up to his room.

Here he busied himself removing the traces of dried blood and dirt from his hands and face, and applying a few pieces of court-plaster over the deeper cuts.

Then he took from his pocket the faded and weather-stained red wallet which his guardian had dropped down the Chimney crevasse.

As a matter of precaution, and to avoid interruption, he locked the door of his chamber before proceeding to examine the pocket-book whose contents was of such importance to Mr. Fleming.

"Howard made the mistake of his life by trying to kill me because I found this wallet. Had he not interfered I should have returned this wallet to his father just as it was. It isn't my nature to pry into other people's property. But I suppose Howard judged me by himself. He felt sure that I would look into it out of mere curiosity, and that I then would discover the secret he and his father have been hiding from me. After what I have heard about the contents of this pocket-book I feel quite justified in looking into it."

He immediately opened the wallet.

From one of the compartments he drew out two legal documents tied together with a rubber band.

The first Clif opened proved to be a deed, duly recorded in the clerk's office at Tucson, Arizona, of a certain 200-acre ranch, fully described as per surveyor's map on file in said county clerk's office, located in the foothills of a detached portion of the Sierra de la Santa Catarina mountain range, in Pinal County, and purchased by Grantley Price from Philip Aroyaz, two years since, for the sum of \$2,000, the receipt of which was duly acknowledged.

The second document was a deed of the above-mentioned property, unrecorded, by which Grantley Price transferred all his right and title therein for the sum of one dollar, to Edward Fleming.

From what the boy had overheard of the conversation between Mr. Fleming and Elliot Monkton, Clif knew that his father's signature on this paper was forged.

"Mr. Monkton is a clever penman, I must say," he muttered, "for if I hadn't learned to the contrary I would be willing to swear that that really was my father's signature."



He read the original deed over carefully, but found not the slightest clue to the existence of a turquoise mine in it.

"I remember that father wrote mother that he had purchased this ranch, but he did not say anything then about having discovered a turquoise mine, either on the property or elsewhere. Mr. Fleming told mother that father sold the ranch at a small profit just before he was taken down with the illness which ended in his death, and of course mother took his word for it. It is clear that Mr. Fleming intended to cheat us out of this property, just as he contemplates to swindle me out of Beeching Hollow, if he can. After what I have learned I guess he will find his work cut out for him. Let me see what else there is of value to me in this wallet. Mr. Fleming said that it contained a paper showing the exact location of the turquoise mine. I am anxious to find it."

The next compartment he examined was full of memoranda of no interest to Clif, and he returned them to their receptacle.

The last compartment in the pocket-book was covered with a flap that fitted so nicely as to almost escape detection.

In fact Clif would have overlooked it but that he subjected the long wallet to the closest kind of inspection in order to try and find the paper descriptive of the turquoise mine.

Raising the flap he saw several papers inside the secret compartment.

The first he pulled out was the very paper he was in search of.

It was a rough diagram of the ranch, with a heavy cross at a certain spot, toward which arrowheads, with attached figures in red ink, pointed.

Several explanatory footnotes at the bottom of the drawing made the diagram easy of comprehension.

Clif soon made out that the cross was the entrance to the mine, and that the figures showed the distances to be measured, and the arrowheads the angles to be followed, in order to arrive at the right spot.

"There ought to be no trouble in finding that mine with the help of this paper," he said to himself. "It is as plain as the nose on one's face."

He pinned this important paper to the original deed bearing the signature of Philip Aroyaz, and then turned his attention to the other papers in the secret compartment.

He was rather startled at what he found.

The first paper was the death-bed statement of one William Tooker, attested by a notary of New York City, and dated six months since.

It purported to show that the said Tooker was an old college chum of Grantley Price, and the real father of Clifford.

The dying man said that about fifteen years previous, being in danger of arrest on a charge of embezzlement, and on the eve of sailing for Australia in order to escape from America and begin life anew in the antipodes, he had

persuaded his old friend Price to adopt his little motherless son, Clifford, then three years old.

Pinned to this statement was a brief letter, apparently in Grantley Price's handwriting, and with his facsimile autograph appended, which stated the conditions agreed to by Tooker, under which he was willing to adopt the boy in question, and bring him up as his own child.

This letter was dated at the time of the alleged adoption, fifteen years since, and was deeply creased in its folds, stained and discolored by time, and on its face seemed to furnish conclusive proof of the dying statement made by William Tooker.

Clif drew a long breath after he had read both documents.

They seemed so real as almost to convince him of their truthfulness.

But a moment's reflection assured him that these documents were simply a part of the plot his guardian had been concocting since his mother's death to bring about his disinheritance.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "What a scoundrel Mr. Fleming is! There isn't much to choose between him and his son. They are both hand-in-glove in this conspiracy to defraud me. Howard, however, seems to be more impatient to get at results than his father. Evidently he figured that my death would be the shortest, as well as the surest, road to the end in view. And I guess he was right."

Clif picked up the bogus deed and was about to tear the three menacing documents into fragments when it occurred to him that it might be better for him to save them.

"I must see Mr. Goodrich, father's lawyer, and tell him what I have learned. I will hand him these forged papers as evidence of my story. I will tell him of the attempt made on my life by my cousin Howard, and hand him the knife I picked up under my jacket at the mouth of the Chimney. Walter will corroborate me in this. Then it will be up to Mr. Goodrich to decide whether Mr. Fleming and his son can be brought to book for their unnatural conduct toward me, and whether the Court can be induced to appoint a new guardian for me. If we could manage to induce this man Monkton to turn against Mr. Fleming, the matter would be easy; but I am afraid this is too much to hope for. Monkton is too big a scamp to be persuaded to do an honest action—that is unless it was made worth his while. Money would buy him, I have no doubt, but I have no means of raising it. Stop! Suppose I were to go to that ranch, mine by rights, locate that mine and work on the quiet, I might be able to realize enough from the rough turquoises to be able to raise a sum sufficient to win the rascal over. It's a good idea, and I'll suggest it to Mr. Goodrich. I might better go there, anywhere in fact, than stay at Beeching Hollow at the probable risk of my life. Perhaps I could get Walter to go with me. I know he'll be glad to go if he could get his father's permission."

Full of his new plans Clif determined to leave the house at once, if he could do so without attracting notice.

"For one night at least I'd like to leave my guardian and his precious son under the impression that I am dead," he



said to himself. "In fact, if I am going to Arizona it would be better that no hint of my purpose should reach Mr. Fleming, to put him on his guard so that he could take measures to thwart me."

Clif replaced all the papers in the pocketbook, returned it to his pocket, hurriedly packed a small grip with sundry things he would need, and turned out his lamp.

Then he went to the window and looked out.

For an early summer evening it was an unusually dark one.

There was no moon, and the stars were obscured by drifting clouds that suggested a possible shower.

The night was admirably suited to his purpose, and he could easily leave his room by way of a trellis work that held up a vine.

"I must unlock my door before I go, or it would give rise to some suspicion. I hope no one has seen the light burning in my room."

Thus speaking he put on his hat and softly crossed the carpet to the door.

Turning the key he opened the door and peered out into the dimly lighted landing.

He heard voices in the hall below.

Curious to learn if the talk had any reference to his supposed absence from home, he tripped quietly over to the baluster rail and listened.

What he heard caused him to decide that he couldn't make his escape from the house any too soon.

## CHAPTER IX.

### CLIF LEAVES BEECHING HOLLOW ON THE QUIET.

Leaning over the baluster Clif heard the voice of Mr. Fleming say:

"What's this you say, Howard? You saw a light in Clifford's room?"

"I did, as plain as I see you now," replied his son in quaking accents.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Mr. Fleming, incredulously. "Why, you told me awhile ago that you actually saw your cousin's ghost in the garden under the sitting-room window. The trouble with you is that your nerves are unstrung after seeing your cousin fall to his death. Persons after going through what you did this afternoon have been known to experience similar hallucinations."

"But I'm afraid to go to my room, father."

"What are you afraid of?"

"I'm afraid I might see——"

"See what? Not your cousin's ghost again?" replied Mr. Fleming, sneeringly.

"I'm afraid he's in his room," said Howard in shaky tones.

"How could he be when according to your account he must be lying dead somewhere in the depths of the Devil's Chimney?"

"I don't mean that he's really there alive. What I mean is that his spirit may have come back to the room."

"Preposterous!" ejaculated his father, impatiently. "There is no such thing as the departed returning to this earth."

"But I've read stories that told of such things."

"All stuff and nonsense!"

"Then how do you account for the light in his room? I've asked every one of the servants, and none has seen Clif since he and Walter Singleton went to the mountains this afternoon."

"You didn't see any light."

"I tell you I did, father," persisted Howard, earnestly.

"You imagined that you did."

"I didn't imagine it at all. I also saw Clif's shadow on one of the blinds. He seemed to be reading a paper."

Mr. Fleming looked searchingly at his son, and seeing that he was thoroughly in earnest he said:

"If you really saw what you assert, then it's a sign that Clifford is not dead at all. He must have escaped in some remarkable manner and has just returned to the house, entering it unobserved. Come upstairs with me and we'll see whether he's there or not. That's the best and quickest way of solving the mystery."

"I'm afraid to go up, father," objected Howard, almost whimpering from fright.

"You needn't feel alarmed while I am with you. We'll either find nothing at all, or we'll find Clifford himself in the flesh."

Mr. Fleming immediately started upstairs, whereupon Clif rushed back into his room, picked up his grip, and getting out of the open window above the trellis vine, quickly slid to the ground, and made off into the darkness.

Howard Fleming followed his father with shaking feet, but nevertheless kept close at his heels.

Mr. Fleming threw open the door of his ward's chamber, and found it was dark and silent.

Not the slightest evidence was there that Clif had lately been in the room.

"I told you that it was all your imagination. The boy is dead, beyond a doubt, and you'll never see him again, unless you look at his remains when they are recovered from the bottom of the crevasse."

Howard Fleming trembled violently, and his father thought he was going to have a fit.

He was certain now that it was the shadow of Clif's ghost he had seen, just as if such a thing as a spook could cast a shadow.

His guilty little soul was almost paralyzed at the idea of his victim coming back to torture him by his presence.

"Oh, lor'!" he gasped. "I wish I hadn't done it."

"Done what?" asked his father, rather sharply.

"Cut the rope."

"Then you did cut the rope, eh?" replied his father, grimly. "I suspected as much. Well, don't worry. It will make you a rich man some day. All that rightfully belonged to Clifford will eventually go to you. You'll never



have to work like less fortunate people, but will live on the fat of the land as long as you live. Come downstairs and I will give you a drink of something that will brace you up. You look as if you needed it."

In the meantime, Clif went on to the village and rang the bell at the Singleton residence.

Walter answered the ring and was greatly surprised to see his chum standing on the porch, grip in hand, at that hour of the night, for it was after nine o'clock.

"Hello, Clif, what's in the wind? You look as if you were going traveling. Come in."

"There's a whole lot in the wind, and I hope to go traveling a long distance," replied Clif, with a faint smile.

"The deuce you say! The folks are just going to bed. We didn't expect visitors; but of course you're always welcome at any hour of the day or night. Come up in my room and we'll have a talk."

"Who's there, Walter?" asked his father, stepping into the hall.

"Clif Price. I'm going to take him to my room. Maybe he'll stay all night with me."

As the two boys occasionally spent a night at each other's homes, nothing was thought of Clif's late visit.

"I'll be glad to stay all night if you'll let me, Walt."

"Let you! Well, say, I'm only too glad to have you. Come on upstairs."

Clif followed his friend to his room.

"Say, old chap," what did you bring the grip for? You ain't going away on a visit, are you?"

"I don't know what I'm going to do yet."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Singleton in some surprise.

"Well, I'll have to tell you a long story before you'll understand. A great deal has happened to me since you left me at my gate to-night."

"You don't say! Let me hear about it."

"By the way, before I begin my story, which you'll find a mighty strange one, do you think you could get me a bite to eat? Any old thing will do. You see I didn't have any dinner. Haven't had a mouthful since one o'clock, when I lunched as usual with Mr. Fleming and Howard."

"The dickens you say!" exclaimed Walter, in astonishment. "How is it that you didn't have your dinner?"

"You will understand why I didn't when you have heard my story."

"Your story must be a corker. Just you wait and I'll find you something in the pantry."

Walter was gone a good ten minutes, and when he came back he had a tray in his hands with a bountiful supply of cold meat, bread and butter, half an apple pie, and a jug of milk.

He placed the tray on his small center table.

"Sit up, Clif, and eat all you can stuff inside of your vest."

"Thank you, Walt. I didn't really know how hungry I was until you brought all this provender under my nose.

You see, when I found out that my cousin had trully cut off that rope and——"

"Then you know that he did do it? I'm not surprised. I thought so from the moment we found his knife under our jackets. And I guess you were almost sure of it, too, if only you didn't want to say so, for family reasons."

Clif made no reply for a minute or two.

He was busy gulping down huge mouthfuls of bread and meat.

His hunger was so keen that the food tasted uncommonly good to him.

After he had taken the edge off his appetite he began to eat and talk at the same time.

He began at the beginning with an account of the interview he had overheard between Mr. Fleming and his son, in which Howard all but admitted that he was responsible for Clif's fall down the Devil's Chimney.

"What a vicious little rascal he is," was Walter's comment.

"Well, I got back at him a little bit," said Clif.

"How did you?" asked Singleton with interest.

"I nearly caused him to have a fit," and Clif went on to explain how his cousin had come upon him almost unawares while he was standing under the window, and how when first Howard saw him he fell into a faint.

"Served him good and right," said Walter, with a satisfied grin.

Clif then went on to describe the interview that took place between his guardian and Monkton, and Singleton listened with amazement on every feature.

"Do you really think that you are the victim of a conspiracy to put you out of your inheritance?"

"I don't think it—I know it," replied Clif, decidedly.

"You know it!"

"I do, and I have proof of it in my pocket now. That lost pocketbook has revealed a whole lot to me. I'm going to take it over to Lawyer Goodrich first thing in the morning and have a serious consultation with him on the subject."

"My gracious!" ejaculated his chum. "What you've been telling me sounds just like the plot of a story book. Who'd ever think your guardian was such a villain?"

Clif showed Walter the two deeds—the true one and the forged—of the ranch down in Arizona, and told him he had the key to the turquoise mine, the entrance to which was at a certain spot on the property.

"I am in hopes of taking a trip there right away," he said.

"What! To Arizona?"

"Yes. And I want you to go with me if you can get your father's permission to do so."

"Gee! That would just suit me. He might let me go with you. As vacation time has just begun, it would be a fine trip for us both."

"That's right. I'd hate to go away out there alone. I must talk your father into letting you come with me."

"You haven't told me your object in going to that ranch



of yours, for it certainly is yours, now that both your father and mother are dead."

"My object in going there is to raise money for a certain purpose I have in view by secretly digging out a quantity of the rough turquoises and then selling them."

Walter was greatly taken with the idea of helping his chum dig for the precious stones in question, and the two boys remained up till after midnight talking and concocting plans for the near future.

## CHAPTER X.

### CAUGHT AT THE STATION.

While Clif and Walter were talking together in the latter's room, Mr. Fleming pretended to be in a dreadful sweat over the unexplained absence of his ward.

He organized a search party and started, first of all, as a blind, for the Witches' Ravine, which was thoroughly explored, naturally without success.

Then he led the way to other spots in the mountain, and finally to the mouth of the Devil's Chimney.

Howard of course went along with the party, for nothing could have induced him to remain behind at the house.

"My gracious!" exclaimed Mr. Fleming, picking up the short end of the severed rope that was attached to the dead tree. "The boys have been here, and I'm afraid a terrible accident has happened to one or both of them. See! This rope has been cut in two by the sharp rock."

The three men servants, who accompanied the acting master of Beeching Hollow and his son, gazed in horror at this evidence of a calamity.

Clif Price, the young heir, was a great favorite with them, and they deplored the idea that anything serious had happened to him.

Mr. Fleming and his son flashed their lanterns down the Chimney, expecting to see Walter Singleton roosting in utter misery on the shelf thirty feet below.

To their surprise there was no sign of him.

"Where could he have got to?" whispered Howard.

Then all at once he recollected that the jackets belonging to the two boys were not on the ground where he had left them.

What did it all mean?

Had Walter managed to escape from his predicament and taken his friend's jacket as well as his own with him?

How could he have crawled up that thirty feet of bare rock?

Father and son were both greatly puzzled to account for the state of affairs.

Howard had, at his father's suggestion, brought a rope of sufficient length to reach the shelf in question.

This was now made fast to the tree, the boy slid down, and standing in a listening attitude, called out repeatedly the names of Clif and Walter.

Not the slightest sound, save a faint echo of his own voice, came back to him.

"It's mighty strange where Walter Singleton went to. It is possible that he may have fallen from this shelf in the dark, and is dead down there also. Had he got out this place somehow he surely would have called at the house to tell the news of Clif's death. I'm afraid he's a goner, too; but who the deuce carried off their jackets?"

He signaled to be drawn up, and was presently standing on the rocks above once more.

"No use staying here any longer, father," said Howard. "Walter Singleton has either got out somehow, or he fell into the Chimney after it got dark."

"If he escaped it's a wonder he didn't stop at the house and notify us of Clifford's death," replied Mr. Fleming. "I don't believe he got out."

"We didn't leave the house until half-past eight. If he was missing at home, it's a wonder his folks didn't send over to inquire about him."

"He's so accustomed to stay with Clifford, sometimes over night, that his parents would suppose he remained at the Hollow."

"That's right, too. Do you think we'd better send over to his house and ask if he has returned home?"

"No. For if he hasn't got home, as I'm afraid is the case, it would alarm his folks. Time enough for them to learn the worst in the morning."

"But I don't understand what became of the two jackets that were up here. Maybe somebody was up here, and helped Walter out."

"That isn't an unreasonable supposition, but in that case he certainly would have stopped at the house, for it's on his road home."

"Well, I can't understand what happened to him, then."

"Nor I, unless he fell into the crevasse. We'll let the matter rest as it is until morning."

The party returned to Beeching Hollow.

That night Howard wouldn't sleep in his own room, which adjoined his cousin's, but insisted on using the lounge in his father's room.

After breakfast next morning, Clif left the Singleton home and made his way to the residence of Lawyer Goodrich.

Here he spent two hours in consultation with his late father's attorney.

The lawyer was amazed at his revelations, and was at first inclined to ridicule his story, but when he produced the documents from the red pocketbook he took a different view of the matter.

Mr. Goodrich did not think that there was sufficient ground to maintain a case against Mr. Fleming, as it was impossible for Clif to produce corroborative evidence to sustain his side of the matter, and Mr. Fleming's word to the contrary was as good as his own.

"You see, my boy, you as the plaintiff would have to produce proof sufficient to overcome any reasonable doubt as to the guilt of your guardian in the transaction. The



best point you have is young Fleming's attempt on your life, but even there, the production of his knife, and the fact that the rope shows plainly that it was cut, is no proof that it was Howard Fleming who did the deed. No one saw him do it, and it is probable no one saw him go up the mountain after you. He would naturally deny his agency in the affair, claim that he had lost his knife, and that some unknown enemy of yours found it, and is the real guilty one. You couldn't make a case against him."

Clif had to admit that as the matter stood he was powerless to punish his cousin.

"If we produced these papers against Mr. Fleming," went on the lawyer, "we would have to prove that the spurious ones were actually forgeries. Your father's signature is so cleverly executed that I myself could not swear it is not genuine. Your suggestion of trying to buy over Monkton is good. I see no other way of thwarting Mr. Fleming's game. He is evidently an uncommonly smart rascal, and has calculated every move. If he had not accidentally lost this pocketbook I am afraid you would ultimately have been placed in a bad position. As the confidant of your mother he has probably learned all the particulars of your birth, and has managed to get hold of and destroy the evidence that would set you right. Or at least he has fixed matters so that it would be next to impossible to trace the truth to its fountain head. Such things have been done before."

Clif admitted the clearness of the lawyer's reasoning.

Then he submitted his plan of going to Arizona, locating the mine, and working it on the quiet until he had accumulated a fund large enough to make an attempt to bribe Monkton.

Lawyer Goodrich had his doubts as to the feasibility of the plan, but agreed that for the present Clif would probably be safer in Arizona than at Beeching Hollow.

"I want to leave Macedonia at once, before Mr. Fleming finds out that I am not really dead. I think it is likely that my friend Walter Singleton will go with me. Of course I'll have to have a little money to pay my expenses. Are you willing to advance me \$100 or so?"

"Certainly I will, my boy. I'll let you have \$250. If you run short write me and I will send you more."

"Thank you, sir. In the meantime I hope you will try and keep an eye on Mr. Fleming's movements, and let me know by telegraph to Tucson if he starts for the ranch, so that I may be on the lookout for him."

"I will keep a bright eye out for your interests, Clifford, never fear. Your father and I were warm personal friends, and I am only too glad to be of service to you. It will be my aim to see that you get your rights."

Clif left the lawyer's house and returned to the Singleton place, where Walter was impatiently waiting for him.

Nothing as yet had been heard from Beeching Hollow, much to Clif's satisfaction.

Clif and Walter had an interview with Mr. Singleton

with reference to the Western trip, and after considerable talk it was finally agreed that Walter, who was not ready to start immediately, should join Clif at the Planters' Hotel in St. Louis a week from that day.

This point having been settled to the satisfaction of the two boys, lunch was announced, and after it was over Clif, grip in hand, and accompanied by Walter, started for the railroad station to catch the 2:30 accommodation bound west.

They reached the outlying station half an hour ahead of train time, and seating themselves at one end of the platform beside a big packing-case, they waited for the train to come along.

Their conversation was wholly in connection with the ranch and the turquoise mine, and so absorbed were they in their plans for the immediate future that they did not observe the approach of two men who had just alighted from a buggy.

The newcomers were Edward Fleming and Elliot Monkton.

Fleming and Monkton had come to terms, and the latter had come to take the train for the nearest city to buy a suitable rope with which to descend into the depths of the Devil's Chimney in quest of the red pocketbook.

The two men came to a stop on the other side of the packing case, and instantly Mr. Fleming's sharp ears had caught the familiar sound of his ward's voice.

Startled and astonished, he looked over the top of the case and saw Clif and his friend Singleton sitting there.

Clif had the red pocketbook in his hand, and was showing the diagram of the mine to Walter.

Mr. Fleming was a quick thinker.

It was clear to him that his nephew had escaped the fate supposed to have befallen him, and moreover had investigated the contents of the lost pocketbook.

His presence at the station, with the grip beside him showed that he was on the point of taking a journey without informing his guardian of his intentions.

He must be headed off and the pocketbook taken from him.

Mr. Fleming drew back and held a whispered conversation with his partner in guilt.

They decided to listen to the conversation between the boys and try to determine just how the case stood.

Inside of ten minutes they had learned enough to confirm Mr. Fleming's worse fears—Clif knew everything.

At that moment the whistle of the train announced its approach from the East.

Clif and Walter rose to their feet.

"Well, old man," said Clif, "I'll see you in St. Louis a week from to-day, eh?"

"Sure thing," replied Singleton.

"I'm afraid not," replied a voice behind them.

They turned quickly and there stood Mr. Fleming and his friend Monkton, who regarded Clif with sardonic satisfaction.



## CHAPTER XI.

## A CATASTROPHE ON THE MISSISSIPPI.

"I am surprised to see you here, Clifford," said Mr. Fleming, in a conciliatory tone. "Where were you all night?"

"I don't believe it makes any difference to you where I was," retorted Clif, aggressively.

"It makes a great deal of difference to me. I am your guardian, and am bound to look after you."

"You needn't worry yourself about me after this. I am going away to spend my vacation in the West."

"Hasn't it occurred to you that I should be consulted in the matter?"

"No, sir. I don't recognize your authority any longer."

"I am afraid that such a remarkable decision on your part will hardly hold water. I stand toward you in the place of your father."

"My real father, or Mr. William Tooker, whom it appears you contemplate bringing forward on paper as my father?"

Mr. Fleming caught his breath at this evidence of the extent of his ward's knowledge of his private plans.

Just then the train rushed up to the station.

A trunk was dumped off on the platform and one passenger alighted.

"All aboard," cried the conductor, signalling the engineer to go ahead.

"Look out, Clif, or you'll lose your train," warned Singleton in his ear.

Clif immediately started for the nearest car, but Monkton headed him off and tried to grab him.

The boy grew desperate as he saw the cars begin to move off.

Seeing that he couldn't reach the train that way he started for the back of the building at top speed.

Fleming and Monkton followed him as fast as they could.

The boy rushed into and across the waiting room.

This move was unexpected by his enemies, who thought he meant to try and escape down the road.

Monkton saw that he could have cut him off if he had waited outside.

It was too late now to rectify that error.

They did not believe that the fugitive could reach the waiting cars now.

The train was pulling out of the station as Clifford Price stepped out on the platform with Fleming and Monkton at his heels.

"Stop him! Stop that boy!" roared Monkton.

Clif darted for the last car and swung himself aboard.

When he turned and bowed mockingly at his disappointed pursuers.

"He's escaped us!" ejaculated Mr. Fleming, furiously, with the contents of the pocketbook in his possession, too. "What is to be done?"

"We must follow him by the next train," replied Monk-

"The next train is the through Pacific Express, and it doesn't stop here."

"Perhaps it can be flagged?" suggested Monkton.

"No. That's against the regulations."

"Then we'll have to take the next train that does stop here."

"The boy will have four hours start of us."

"That can't be helped. We've got to follow him, for there's a fortune at stake. We must recover those papers at any cost."

"Yes, we must get them back," nodded Mr. Fleming.

"And you'd better see to it that this boy does not get back, or you may have to face awkward charges in court. Now that he's wise to your plans there is no certainty that your scheme will succeed as long as he is alive."

"I hope we shall be able to overhaul him," said Fleming. "He will probably expect that we will follow him, and will use every endeavor to throw us off his track. It may prove to be a case of hunting for a needle in a haystack."

"Not at all. Didn't you hear him say to that other lad that he'd meet him in St. Louis a week from to-day?"

"That's so. I forgot about it."

"If we fail to overhaul him between here and that city, we ought to be able to catch him there. If I was you I'd telegraph to the police to be on the lookout for him, and order them to arrest him on his arrival."

"That won't do. It would lead to explanations that I want to avoid. We must catch him ourselves. Come, we'll return to Beeching Hollow, and I'll prepare for the trip."

They boarded the buggy and drove off down the road, intending to return in time to take the 6.30 local westward.

The train which bore Clif westward stopped at frequent intervals until it reached the flourishing city of Delhi at 5.30.

Clif left it there and went into the railroad eating house for his supper, for he intended to board the Pacific Express as soon as it reached that place.

He had just finished his meal when the express pulled in, and stopped twenty minutes for the passengers to eat.

Clif bought a ticket through to St. Louis, with sleeper accommodations, and when the express pulled out for the southwest he was aboard.

On the following afternoon he reached the metropolis of Missouri and was driven to the Planters' Hotel, where he registered.

"I've got five days to put in here before Walt shows up," he said to himself, "so I suppose I might as well do the town on my own hook. It was most unfortunate that Mr. Fleming should have caught me leaving Macedonia. I had hoped to throw him off my track entirely. Now I suppose he will chase me all the way to Arizona and give me no end of trouble. Well, the only thing I can do is to be on the lookout for him. He is not likely to run across me on the way, and he hasn't any idea that I have arranged to stop over in this city. My five days' wait here will give him time to reach the ranch ahead of me. I suppose he'll bring Monkton with him to assist in capturing me and



getting possession of the red pocketbook. The safest thing for me to do is to take the diagram of the mine out of the wallet and stitch it up in my jacket. It wouldn't be a bad idea to make another drawing like it, altering the positions of the cross and the direction of the arrowheads. Then if he should happen to corner me and get possession of the pocketbook he would be all at sea trying to locate the mine. As for the other documents, they're safe with Mr. Goodrich, and he'll never get hold of them."

So that evening Clif got a piece of paper similar to the one on which the diagram was drawn, and made an altered duplicate with great care.

He put the bogus diagram into the secret compartment of the wallet, while the genuine one he placed inside of his right stocking.

"Now Mr. Fleming is at liberty to take his pocketbook whenever he gets the chance," said Clif, with a chuckle.

In an evening paper he saw the advertisement of an excursion trip down the Mississippi River for the next day, and he decided to avail himself of the chance to see what he could of the Father of Waters.

Accordingly he made all the necessary inquiries that evening as to the boat wharf and the easiest way of getting there.

The steamer was announced to leave at nine o'clock, so Clif left an early call at the office before he went to his room.

He had his breakfast at 7.30, and then took a car for the nearest point to the boat landing.

Two hours later, Mr. Fleming and Monkton entered the Planters' Hotel and consulted the register at the office.

They found, as they expected, that Clif had arrived the preceding afternoon.

Mr. Fleming asked for him, and the clerk answered that the lad had gone on an excursion down the river and would not be back until seven or eight that evening.

Fleming and his side partner then left with the intention of returning the next morning.

While the two rascals were pursuing their investigations, Clif was on the river enjoying the novelty of the splendid sail, and admiring, at a respectable distance, a very pretty girl with golden hair and blue eyes, who was also on board with a gentleman who looked to be her father.

"Gee! She's a peach," said the boy to himself. "I wish I could make her acquaintance."

There seemed to be very little chance of his doing so, though their eyes met several times, and the girl seemed to take as much interest in Clif as he did in her.

Dinner was served on board at half-past twelve, and much to Clif's satisfaction, the gentleman and his daughter took seats next to him.

Our hero tried to improve the opportunity by passing her such dishes as lay within his reach, for which he received from her a winning smile and a thank you.

After dinner he watched where she and her father took seats in the stern of the steamer, and he secured a camp chair as close to her as he dared go.

For the next hour he divided his attention about equally between the pretty girl and the panoramic view of the shores of the Mississippi.

It was about this time that the boat made a wide sweep around to head back up the river.

Hardly was her nose pointed northward when, without the slightest warning, a tremendous explosion shook her from stem to stern.

The force of the shock seemed to tear her asunder.

Clif felt himself raised in a mass of debris and fairly blown into the river, and the next thing he knew he was sinking down into the cool depths of the river.

## CHAPTER XII.

### CLIF SAVES THE LIFE OF THE GIRL WITH THE GOLDEN HAIR.

Clif, however, was a splendid swimmer, and thoroughly at home in the water.

Although he was pretty well dazed when he struck and disappeared under the surface of the river, contact with the cool water brought all his senses back to him and he pushed himself toward the surface.

When his head shot above the water, and he had taken a good breath of fresh air into his lungs, he was in full control of his faculties.

His first thought was for the lovely young girl who occupied a seat on the boat so near himself, and he looked around in search of her, determined to save her life at any risk to himself.

The river all about was covered with struggling victims of the disaster and pieces of shattered wood from the wrecked steamer.

The boat herself was close at hand, but in a roaring blaze of fire that would shortly consume what was left of her above the water-line.

A cluster of passengers were gathered on her lower deck forward crying frantically for help, while a score of boats and small craft from either shore were trying to reach the locality in time to rescue as many of the unfortunates as the circumstances would permit.

Clif saw no sign of the golden-haired girl anywhere around, and his heart sank as he pictured her lying in the last throes of suffocation at the bottom of the river.

As he swam hither and thither in a vain endeavor to single her out among the many struggling forms in the vicinity, the object of his thoughts suddenly rose to the surface within a yard of him.

He saw her at once, and with a cry of satisfaction he pushed toward and seized her just as she commenced to struggle and throw up her hands.

He had been careful to get a back grasp on her under her arms, so as to avoid her frantic clutch.

"Don't struggle so. Be quiet and I'll save you," he said reassuringly in her ears.



The girl seemed to understand and, feeling that she was being sustained above the water, ceased all her movements.

Finding that she was behaving in a sensible way, he worked around to her side and, supporting her with one arm, struck out with the other for a large piece of wreckage floating near by.

Reaching it he told her to grab hold, and she did so at once.

Then their eyes met and she recognized him with a faint smile.

"My father!" she breathed. "Where is he?"

"Can he swim?" asked Clif.

"Oh, yes; but he may have been killed by that awful hock."

"I guess not," he answered cheerily, by way of encouraging her. "As long as he can swim, he'll be saved by one of those boats that are coming up."

"Oh, I hope so—I hope so," she murmured. "I have nobody but papa, and it would kill me if anything happened to him."

"Nothing will happen to him if he can keep above water or awhile."

"You were so good to save me from going down again. I now I owe my life to you. I shall always be grateful to you," she said fervently.

"Don't mention it, miss. I thought of you right away, or I was sitting close to you on the boat, and determined to have Florence were in sight."

"Yes, I remember you. You sat next to me at the table, and were very polite to me. Father said that you seemed to be a very nice boy."

While they were talking a row-boat came up and they were taken on board.

The boatmen rowed around, picked up several others, and were about starting for the shore when Clif saw a man, quite exhausted, clinging to a fragment that was hardly buoyant enough to support him.

He thought the man looked like the fair girl's father, and he called the rowers' attention to him.

"The boat is overcrowded now. We can't take another aboard," was the reply.

"Let him have my place, then," answered the generous Clif. "I'm a good swimmer. I'll take my chance overboard."

The girl seized his hand tremulously as he rose to spring into the water and help the man nearby into the boat.

"Don't go," she whispered. "You might be drowned."

"Don't worry. That man is your father, I think. Bet- for you and him, too, that he be taken into the boat."

As he spoke she looked eagerly at the man in the water and then screamed:

Father! It is my father. Oh, save him!"

Clif plashed into the river, and in another moment was supporting and guiding the gentleman to the boat.

He was carefully lifted in and given Clif's place, and the boat was propelled shoreward with the brave boy clinging to the top of the rudder.

In fifteen minutes the boat was brought up against the bank of the river, on the Illinois shore, and her passengers assisted to land.

The golden-haired girl, now no longer anxious about her father, ran to Clif as he walked out of the river like a dripping Newfoundland dog, and seized him by the hand.

"You are so good and noble," she cried, looking gratefully into his face. "You helped to save my father when the men would have left him behind. I shall never forget you—never!"

She drew him toward her father, to whom she had already confided the fact that she owed her own life to Clif.

The gentleman grasped him by the hand and, with tears in his eyes, thanked him for what he had done for his daughter, as well as for himself.

"What is your name, my lad?"

"Clifford Price."

"My name is Cowell, and this is my daughter Florence."

Clif bowed and smiled.

"I am happy to know you, Mr. Cowell, and you, too, Miss Florence," he said.

"Come," said the gentleman. "Let us follow the others. There are houses yonder where we can probably get our clothes dried. We cannot very well return to St. Louis in this condition."

The people in the neighborhood were only too happy to render the victims of the disaster all the assistance in their power.

Mr. Cowell, his daughter and Clif were taken into one of the houses near by, where Florence and a drenched lady that came on the boat were shown to a room to undress, while Mr. Cowell and our hero were assigned to another.

In removing his socks Clif thought of the precious diagram with some misgivings, but found that, though it was water-soaked, none of the ink had spread as to render any part of it illegible.

He dried it on the window sill in the sun, while he sat near wrapped in a blanket.

While waiting for their clothes to dry Clif and Mr. Cowell became very well acquainted.

The gentleman took a great fancy to the plucky boy, and Clif on his part was equally well taken with Mr. Cowell.

So much so indeed that he told him his whole history, and the reason that brought him West and was taking him to his late father's ranch in Pinal County, Arizona.

Mr. Cowell was much impressed by the boy's story, and promised to assist him in his efforts to get his rights.

"I am pretty well off, Clifford—you will permit me to so address you after what you have done for me and my only child—and it will give me great pleasure as well as satisfaction to cancel my obligation to you in as substantial a way as I can. We are going to San Francisco by the Southern Pacific route, which will take us through Tucson, Arizona. You and your friend, whom you are waiting for, shall go with us. We will break our trip at Tucson, and while my daughter remains at a hotel in that town I will accompany you both to the ranch and help you find your



mine, and protect you to the fullest extent of my ability."

"I am very much obliged to you, sir, for your generous offer, and accept it with pleasure, all the more as I feel certain that my faithless guardian and his accomplice are on my track, and will probably stop at nothing to accomplish their purpose."

"I will stand by you, never fear. Here are our clothes now. Let us get into them. Then we will try and get back to St. Louis as soon as possible. This has been a most unfortunate excursion. I fear many people have lost their lives, and many more have suffered serious injuries. The boat must have had an old and defective boiler. The inspectors whose business it is to pass on such things have been lax in their duties. After all, it is the same old story. In spite of repeated accidents to river and other steamers the same thing with variations happens right along. The newspapers will make a great outcry over this affair, and call for needed reforms. There will, of course, be an investigation; but you will find that little will be done in the long run."

They got a conveyance to take them to the nearest railroad station, and on their way up to East St. Louis, Mr. Cowell suggested that Clif transfer himself from the Planters' Hotel to the Carondelet, where the Cowells were stopping, and consider himself as Mr. Cowell's guest during the rest of his stay in the city.

"You can leave word with the clerk to inform your friend, Singleton, when he comes, where he can find you."

Clif liked the idea very much, especially as Florence joined in the invitation with her father, and so when they had crossed the river to St. Louis proper, he went with them to the Carondelet to take dinner.

After the meal he returned to the Planters' Hotel, told the clerk that he was going to leave in the morning, and that he was to direct his friend, whom he expected to arrive on Wednesday of the next week, that he would be found at the Carondelet.

The clerk said all right, and then mentioned the fact that two men had called that morning and asked for him.

"Did they leave their names?" he asked, with a strong suspicion as to the identity of his visitors.

"No. They merely asked if you were in. And when I told them that you had gone on a river excursion they went away."

"Well, I have no friends in this city, but I have two enemies who are following me on my journey to the southwest. When those chaps call again tell them I have left the city, and you will do me a favor."

The clerk nodded and Clif went to his room.

Next morning he went to the Carondelet Hotel.

### CHAPTER XIII.

WALTER SINGLETON JOINS CLIF AT ST. LOUIS.

When Mr. Fleming read the account of the steamboat disaster on the river in the evening paper he hardly knew

whether to be sorry or glad at the possibility of his having lost his life.

The boy's death would certainly have afforded him the greatest satisfaction but for the fact that he carried the diagram of the location of the turquoise mine on his person.

Still, there was hope in the fact that his body, if he was among the lost, would probably be recovered from the river, and then Mr. Fleming would no doubt find the red pocket-book on his person.

After a consultation with Monkton, both went around the Planters' Hotel next morning to make inquiries.

Then they found that Clif had turned up all right on the evening before, having been so fortunate as to escape the fate that overtook more than fifty of the excursionists.

The clerk, complying with Clif's request, told Mr. Fleming that the boy had left the hotel that morning with the intention of taking a train out of the city.

"That's funny," said Monkton, when Mr. Fleming told him. "He was to stay here until next Wednesday, when that Singleton boy was to join him."

"He must have made some change in his arrangements then. The best thing we can do is to take a train for Tucson at once. We will no doubt find him there, as I am satisfied that the ranch is his objective point."

"There's little doubt about that," agreed Monkton. "In my mind the best and safest way to deal with him is to wait and lay him at or on his way to the ranch. You and I ought to be easily able to do up both him and you. We will have a hundred chances in Arizona to get our object to one elsewhere."

"I guess you're right, Monkton," replied Mr. Fleming. "We'll look up the Sante Fe time-tables and buy tickets at Tucson. We're bound to catch the boys at the ranch at any way."

Late that afternoon the two rascals left St. Louis for Arizona by the Sante Fe route.

During the next few days Clif enjoyed himself immensely, escorting Florence Cowell to various points of interest in the city.

On Monday afternoon he received a telegram from Walter Singleton informing him that his chum would leave the village of Macedonia next morning for Delhi to catch the Pacific Express for St. Louis, which would land in that city late Wednesday afternoon, according to previous arrangements.

Clif decided to go to the depot and meet his friend instead of letting him go to the Planters' Hotel.

Accordingly, after finding out the exact time when the express was due, he took his way to the Union station.

He stood at the exit gate while the St. Louis passenger train filed out, and presently spied his chum coming along, with the diagram in hand.

"Hello, Walt," he exclaimed, grabbing him by the arm.

"Why, hello, Clif," returned the delighted newcomer.

"I didn't expect to see you here."

"Thought I'd come and meet you, as I've left the Planters' Hotel and taken up quarters at the Carondelet."



"Glad you came. How came you to make the change? The Carondelet is more expensive, isn't it?"

"Yes. It's one of the best hotels in the city. It's not costing me anything, however."

"It isn't? How is that?" asked Walter, in surprise.

"I'm the guest of a Mr. Warren Cowell and his daughter."

"The dickens you are! Who are they?"

"I made their acquaintance in rather a sensational way."

"You did, eh?"

"I'll tell you how it came about. On the morning after the day I reached here I went on an excursion down the Mississippi. Mr. Cowell and his daughter were on board with probably a couple of hundred others. As the steamer was making the turn to come back, about forty miles below here, her boiler exploded."

"What?"

"Her boiler went up and I, with the rest of the passengers seated on the deck astern, was blown into the river."

Didn't you hear anything about the accident? It was probably printed in some shape in most all of the papers of the country. Fifty people lost their lives."

"I didn't read anything about it," replied Singleton.

"Well, I saved the life of Florence Cowell, and also assisted her father out of the river. That's how I made their acquaintance, and I am pretty solid with them."

"I should think you would be after that."

"Florence is the finest girl I ever knew, and one of the prettiest. She's got golden hair, blue eyes, a peaches and cream complexion, and——"

"You're dead gone on her, why don't you say?" grinned Walter.

"Well, I don't deny but I think a whole lot of her," admitted Clif, flushing up in a guilty way.

"Of course you do. I can see it in your face," laughed Singleton.

Clif then went on to tell his chum how Mr. Cowell and his daughter were going to the Pacific slope over the Santa Fe and Southern Pacific routes.

"He has volunteered to see us through with the object of our visit to Arizona."

"No! Is that so?"

"Yes. I've told him everything about my circumstances, and he says he's going to stand by me."

Now it's a first rate. I suppose you'll not be surprised to learn that your guardian and his friend Monkton left Macedonia the same afternoon you did, and of course they're passing you."

"I know it. They were in the city last week looking for me."

"Did you see them?"

"No; but they got on to the fact that I was stopping at the Planters' Hotel, and they came there inquiring for me."

"They did? They must have overheard us talking at the Plantation that day. Are they here yet?"

"I haven't seen or heard from them if they are. I told

the clerk at the Planters' to tell them if they called again that I had left the city. In that case they probably supposed I had gone to Tucson, and took a train for that point. If they did that they'll be disappointed to find that I was not there. It is pretty certain though that they'll wait there for us to turn up, then there'll be something doing. I've bought a revolver to protect myself. It wouldn't be a bad idea for you to get one, too, though, of course, they've no designs against you."

"I'll buy one. When do we start for Arizona?"

"To-morrow morning. The Cowells are all ready to continue their journey. We have been waiting for you to arrive."

By this time they had reached the Carondelet Hotel, and Clif carried his chum to his own room after he had registered.

A little later he took Walter to the Cowells' apartments and introduced him to Florence and her father.

Walter was much impressed by Florence's beauty and vivacious manner, and he soon had the opportunity of observing that his friend was the whole thing with her.

After dinner they went to the theater, and next morning at eight the little party took the morning express over the Santa Fe road for the southwest.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### OFF FOR THE RANCH.

On the evening of the second day after leaving St. Louis the Pacific Express dropped Mr. Warren Cowell, his daughter, Clif Price and Walter Singleton at Tucson, Arizona.

They boarded a bus for the Tucson House.

Two men standing in the shadow of the station noted the arrival of the party.

The reader need scarcely be told that the men were Fleming and Monkton, who had been in town several days.

They had come every evening to the station to watch the arrivals by the train, on the lookout for Clif and his companion.

At last their vigilance was rewarded.

"The boys seem to have made the acquaintance of some tourist and his daughter," said Fleming.

"What of it?" replied Monkton. "The gentleman and the girl will probably go on to-morrow night. They've merely stopped over to see the town. There's no hurry getting at the boy. A day or two more or less amounts to nothing. We're all ready to follow them to the ranch as soon as they start."

"Well, they'll be at the Tucson House to-night at any rate. Probably after supper they'll take a look around town. We might find a chance to catch them somewhere. They're not likely to be on their guard, as they have no reason to suspect that we have followed them here."

"If they'd only wander into Bunsen's Music Hall we



could manage to trap them, I think. The only difficulty in the way is that this tourist will probably take in the sights with them. Our aim must be to separate your nephew from his companions if we can."

"We'll see what we can do. We must take care, however, that neither of the boys spots us."

"Of course."

Thus speaking the two conspirators walked up the street toward Bunsen's Hotel, which adjoined the music hall, where they had quarters, and were on good terms with many of the tough employees of the establishment.

Although the Tucson House was the best hotel in the town it was not to be compared with even a city second-class hotel.

The table and the rooms, however, were as good as could be expected in that sparsely settled section of our country, and Mr. Cowell and his party had no kick coming.

After supper the four started out to view the town, which was at its best, or worst, whichever you call it, after dark.

There were drinking saloons, gambling joints, and such, in full blast, with wide open doors as an invitation to the passerby.

There was no lack of excitement at night in Tucson, and you didn't have to go far in any direction to find it.

As a rule the places were orderly and well regulated, but, of course, there were some establishments where the limit was squeezed almost to the breaking point.

Bunsen's Music Hall was one of the most notorious resorts in town.

It was a combined bar-room and theater where a lengthy vaudeville show held forth till midnight.

After the show the tables and chairs were moved to the sides of the main room and dancing was indulged in until daylight.

There were gambling rooms somewhere upstairs that were easy of access.

Once in a while there was a shooting scrape in Bunsen's, but no one seemed to get excited over such things.

The hotel next door was patronized chiefly by shady characters and the toughest of town visitors.

Mr. Fleming and Monkton were the most respectable looking of its patrons, but the rest of the crowd seemed to recognize them as birds of a feather, and they attracted no particular attention.

Clif Price walked with Florence.

Her fresh beauty and innocence drew a good deal of notice to her and her companion as they walked past the brilliantly lighted establishments that resounded with noise or melody, as the case might be.

At some little distance behind the party walked Fleming and Monkton, with their soft, wide-brimmed hats pulled well down over their foreheads.

The presence of the girl with Clif rather upset their calculations, for it was evident that she would not be introduced to the interior of any of the pleasure resorts.

It therefore looked as if Clif was safe from their machinations for that night.

And such proved to be the case, for after an hour's jaunt Mr. Cowell and his party returned to the Tucson House and retired.

Next morning Mr. Cowell accompanied the boys to the county clerk's office, where they got full particulars of the location of the ranch.

Afterward they went to the Tucson cemetery where Clif's father was buried.

Grantley Price's grave looked neglected and rather forlorn, like the majority of the last resting places of Tucson dead.

They identified it by a small headstone which Mr. Fleming had caused to be put there.

After returning to the hotel for the midday meal they spent the afternoon making purchases and sundry arrangements for their trip to the ranch.

Mr. Cowell decided that it would not be well to leave Florence alone at the hotel until their return, as there was no telling when they would get back.

She herself would have put up a vigorous protest if such a suggestion had been advanced.

She was fully prepared to rough it with her father and the boys, and asserted that she was rather pleased with the novelty of the contemplated expedition.

So it was arranged that she was to go along, and she was taken to insure her comfort as much as possible.

Fleming and Monkton were somewhat disgruntled when they found that Mr. Cowell and his daughter did not start that night by the Pacific Express as they had expected.

They were still more upset when they saw the party start next morning in a well filled, covered wagon, drawn by a spanking team of horses, and take the road for an northern spur of the Sierra de la Santa Catarina mountains.

They did not need to inquire whither the party was bound.

They easily guessed that the Price ranch was the objective point.

"It looks as if we had our work cut out for us now," remarked Monkton. "It is clear that boy is smarter than we are. He has found a good friend who is ready to help him through with his project. It is not unlikely that the boy has offered him an interest in the mine, and thus secured his co-operation. We'll have to adopt strong measures now, or throw up our hands. I hope you have the sand to see the matter through to the end. You have more at stake than I. If I was in your shoes I'd take other measures as would end in the wiping out of that lad. Von he lives your hold on the mine, as well as on Beeching's low, is mighty precarious. I hope you realize this."

"I realize it only too well," replied Mr. Fleming, mildly. "Well, what do you propose?"

"Will you be guided by me?"

"I will. I have no other recourse."

"Very good. Let's go back to Bunsen's. We can pick up a couple of chaps there who, for a consideration, will be glad to help us out in this matter."

"All right. I leave the arrangements to you. You have the



interests are identified with mine. We are now hand-in-glove as we never were before. In this chase for a fortune we've got to win, or the future has nothing in it for either of us." "Now you're talking, Fleming. I'm out for a quarter interest in the mine, and I'm going to have it, or learn the reason why not."

About the middle of the afternoon, Fleming, Monkton and two hard-looking individuals, all armed, mounted on sturdy horses, with several days' supplies strapped behind their saddles, left Tucson by the same road taken earlier in the day by the covered wagon.

Their destination also was the northern spur of the Sierra de la Santa Catarina mountains, where the deserted Price ranch lay among the foothills.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE DESERTED RANCH.

Mr. Cowell drove the wagon for the first hour after leaving Tucson, then Clif took a turn at the reins, and after sixty minutes of it yielded up the seat to Singleton.

At the end of the third hour they decided it was time for the noonday repast.

The horses were liberated from the wagon and tethered with long ropes in the grass, while the two boys, Florence and her father, sat down in the shade of a tree and ate a lunch prepared for them by the hotel people.

After an hour's rest the horses were hitched to again, and the journey toward the Price ranch resumed, Mr. Cowell and the boys alternating as before in the driver's seat. Arizona has the reputation of being a pretty hot State at the summer time, and it fully sustained its reputation that day.

Mr. Cowell was sorry that he hadn't taken the hotel keeper's advice and postponed the journey until after sundown.

The horses being used to the climatic conditions didn't suffer as much in the sun as the four travelers in the shade of the canvas wagon flap.

As the sun neared the horizon the atmosphere grew more marable. At sundown another halt was made for supper.

This time a fire was built by the roadside and a pot of steeff made by Miss Florence, while Clif fried a mass of Wilcon and eggs.

Plenty of good bread and butter, with a whole pie to top it, their al fresco banquet, completed a very satisfactory meal.

"How far have we come?" asked Walter.

"About forty miles," replied Mr. Cowell.

"How far have we yet to go to reach the ranch?"

"Twenty miles or so; but we'll make much better time the balance of the trip as the air is cooler, and the temperature will continue to drop until sunrise. We ought to reach the ranch by half-past nine at the latest."

It was dusk when they resumed the last stage of their journey.

The mountain range was on their right with a vast plain stretching away to the northwest, west and south.

As the light of day faded away the stars came out with unusual brilliancy, promising a perfect night.

After they had covered the greater part of the twenty miles the moon rose above the mountain range and flooded the great plain with a soft, mellow radiance.

"It's a lovely night, isn't it, Clif?" asked Florence enthusiastically.

"Fine," he replied. "Almost as lovely as——"

"What?" she asked, when he paused.

"Yourself," he whispered in her ear.

Florence blushed vividly, but as it was dark Clif didn't notice it.

They were sitting back in the wagon, while Mr. Cowell and Singleton occupied the driver's seat.

"I suppose when you go on to California you'll forget all about me," said Clif, feeling as if their separation would prove a serious matter for him.

"I shall never forget you," she answered softly.

"Do you really mean that?" he asked eagerly.

"I do. How could I forget you when I owe my life to you?"

"I know you feel grateful to me, but I'd much rather that you'd remember me for a different reason."

"A different reason?" she asked. "I don't understand you."

"Well, if you don't understand, I had better not try to explain. I thought—however, it doesn't matter. I hope you will have a good time, and that I shall see you again when you come East."

"Of course, you will see me again. You must come and pay us a nice long visit at our home in Chicago."

"I shall be glad to do so if I can. I almost wish I hadn't met you because—well, because I know I shall miss you a whole lot after you are gone. I shall feel as if there was something missing that cannot be replaced until we meet once more."

"I shall miss you, of course, too," she answered in a low voice. "I wish you were going with us. Don't you think you could manage to do so? Father would be very glad to have you. He told me so last night."

"Nothing would give me more pleasure, but I hardly think I can. My affairs are so unsettled as yet. Until this matter of my inheritance is arranged satisfactorily I shall feel like a kind of outcast. Beeching Hollow is my home, but so long as it is controlled by my faithless guardian I never can expect to return there. I don't believe my life would be safe there."

"It is terrible to think how you are situated, Clif," she replied, in a sympathetic tone. "But don't be downhearted. Father will stick by you and see that you are righted. There are bright days ahead of you."

"I hope so. The brightest, however, will be those in which you have a part. In the short time I have known



you I have learned to care a great deal for you, and I know I shall keep right on caring more for you every day, unless—you tell me not to. And even then—but I've no right to talk to you this way. I might offend you, and——"

"No, no, you will never offend me, Clif," she said earnestly.

"Then you do care a little for me, do you, Florence?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

"Very much indeed."

"If I thought you cared as much for me as I do for you I'd feel very happy indeed—so happy that I wouldn't care whether school kept or not."

Florence averted her face and made no reply.

At that moment Walter sang out:

"There's your ranch yonder, I guess, Clif."

Both Clif and Florence bent forward and looked toward the foothills where the moonlight shone down on a rambling two-story building with several outhouses around it.

They could see the snake fence stretching in two directions, and a white streak bordered by trees leading up from what appeared to be the main gate.

There were bigger ranches on either side of it, with lights in the windows of the houses, but the Price ranch looked dark, and gloomy, and uninviting.

They drove up to the gate, the boys got down and opened it, and closed it again when Mr. Cowell drove the wagon into the white lane.

Then they rode up to the house.

The doors were all locked and they had no key with which to enter, but this difficulty was overcome by forcing one of the kitchen windows.

They had brought three lamps with them and a supply of oil, and soon had a light to view their surroundings.

The house was completely furnished, just as the original owner had turned it over to Mr. Price at the time of the sale, but everything was covered with the dust of two years' unoccupancy.

Clif was surprised to find things in such good shape.

He had been more than half afraid that they would only find a wreck.

Florence found a broom and gave the living room a rough sweeping, while her father and the boys broke into the barn, put the horses in the stalls and watered and fed them.

The wagon was then pushed into the building and the door secured again temporarily.

They had brought four single mattresses with them, with a sufficiency of sheets and a light blanket apiece.

These they carried into the house and placed in the rooms assigned to Florence, Mr. Cowell and the two boys, after the windows had been opened and the rooms well aired.

They only removed enough of the dust to answer their purposes for the night, intending to put the house in order next day.

Finally they bade one another good night, the lights

were soon afterward extinguished, and but for the open windows the building looked as it had looked from the outside for two years past.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### HOW THE CHASE ENDED—CONCLUSION.

Clif found it an uncommonly hard matter to get asleep that night, while Walter on the contrary dropped off once.

After rolling first on one side and then on the other, in a vain attempt to woo unconsciousness, he finally got unneasy and leaned out of the window.

The air was warm and still, while the night was a perfect one.

Sound travels far under such conditions.

Before he had been at the window a minute he heard the sound of men's voices around the corner of the house.

He listened attentively, and it struck him that there was a familiar ring in the tones of one of the intruders.

Instantly it occurred to him that the nocturnal visitors were Mr. Fleming and his associate, Monkton.

Had they recognized him and Walter in Tucson and followed the party out to the ranch, or were they already robbing the ground when Clif and his companions arrived?

That's the way the boy put it to himself, but he had no means of knowing which of the two ideas was the correct one.

However, they were on hand now past all doubt, and the question that agitated Clif's mind was what game was up to, and how should he deal with them?

Presently four men appeared from around the corner of the house and Clif drew his head in to prevent being seen.

It was well he did so, for they looked up at the open window and stopped right beneath it.

"We'd better make an entrance by this window," said Fleming.

"I think it would be much easier to force one of the kitchen windows," answered Monkton.

"The noise might arouse them. When I was here, before, two years ago, there was a ladder lying in the back of the barn. If it is there still it will serve our purpose first rate."

"All right," replied his associate. "Jenkins, you go to the back of the barn and see if there is a ladder on the ground. If there is bring it here."

The two tough-looking rascals started off to carry out their order into execution.

"We must be cautious," said Mr. Fleming. "The gentleman may not be in the room above, but in an adjoining one. We mustn't awake either the gentleman or his daughter."

"No, nor the boys either, if we can help it," said Monkton. "The easiest way is always the best. Still we've got to get possession of that pocket-book at all hazards."



it is in our hands the game is as good as won, as far as the mine is concerned, and that is all that interests me. As for yourself, the boy being a standing menace to you the three of us are willing to help you put him out of the way if you say the word. I've got a phial of chloroform in my pocket. A handkerchief well soaked with it and pressed over his nostrils for a few minutes will end his earthly account without a struggle. In the morning it will be supposed that he died in his sleep of heart failure, or something of that sort."

"Dare you murder him?" hoarsely whispered Mr. Fleming.

"I dare all right; but I'm not going to. It's not my funeral but yours. I have done my share in fetching the means and offering the suggestion, it is up to you to carry it out."

"Isn't there some other way of dealing with the boy?"

"None quite as effective, or more merciful. We could, of course, drug and carry him off to some hole in the hills, somewhere we could leave him gagged and bound to starve to death. But why put the lad in misery when an easy death can be handed out to him?"

"I would rather not kill him at all," objected Mr. Fleming.

"That's where you're a fool, Fleming. The boy has probably acquainted this tourist with the facts of his case, and secured his help by offering him an interest in the mine. Besides, we have good reason to believe that he may have confided a knowledge of your plot to Lawyer Goodrich. Your son caught him listening to our conversation under the sitting-room window that night, and unfortunately took him for a ghost. You can't possibly let him live and hope to win out. With the documents in your possession, and the boy dead, you will have plain sailing. Otherwise, you ought to know what you may expect to be up against."

At that moment the two men returned with the ladder.

"Here's the ladder now," added Monkton. "I'll go up first."

Clif had heard every word with the greatest distinctness. He saw that his case was desperate.

His life as well as the contents of the pocket-book he was supposed to carry with him was in jeopardy.

Well, he was prepared to defend himself, even if he had to shoot to kill to do it.

He didn't want anybody's blood on his hands, least of all his guardian's, but if Mr. Fleming forced the issue himself he didn't think he would be responsible for what happened.

Placing his hand over Walter's mouth he aroused him. "Hush!" he whispered in his chum's ear.

"What's the matter?" asked Walter, starting up.

"My enemies are under the window with a ladder and are about to enter the house. They have two other men with them, and it is evident that they mean business. Where's your revolver?"

"In my jacket pocket."

"Get it out. We must not let them get a foothold in the room. Monkton has suggested that I be chloroformed out of the world, and I fear Mr. Fleming has been persuaded to carry the idea out. We must wing these rascals when they appear, and put it out of their power to do us further injury while we're here on the ranch."

Clif's sharp eyes saw the top of the ladder drop against the window sill at that moment.

There was no time to be lost, and he drew his chum back into the shadows.

Presently Monkton's head appeared at the window.

After pausing a moment and looking in, he motioned to Fleming behind him and stepped softly into the room.

Fleming now showed in the opening and placed his leg across the sill.

"Now," whispered Clif in his companion's ear. "Shoot Monkton in the leg and I will do the same with Mr. Fleming. Fire."

Almost simultaneously the two revolvers awoke the echoes of the room and house.

Monkton uttered a cry of agony, staggered a few steps and fell flat on the floor.

Singleton had not made sufficient allowance for the kick of his weapon, and the bullet instead of striking the man's thigh, as Walter intended, penetrated his abdomen and inflicted a mortal wound.

Clif's ball, on the contrary, had gone unerringly into Fleming's extended thigh, broken the bone, and rendered him hors du combat on the window sill.

The two rascals outside, alarmed by the shots and the cries of their two employers, stood for a few moments undecided, and then scooted out of sight around the house, making for the spot where the four horses were tied to a fence.

Of course the shots had aroused both Mr. Cowell and his daughter from their sleep, and while the latter lay and trembled with alarm, the former rushed at once into the boys' room, and found Clif and Walter helping the wounded Fleming through the window into the room, where they laid him on the nearest mattress, for he was suffering great pain.

Monkton was unconscious.

The lamp was lighted and then Clif made a hasty explanation of the circumstances, repeating as near as he could remember the conversation he had overheard between Mr. Fleming and Monkton.

"This man looks as if he had been hard hit," said Mr. Cowell, pointing to the unconscious Monkton. "Which of you fired at him?"

"I did," replied Walter, promptly. "He's hit in the leg, isn't he?"

"I'm afraid he's shot in a more vital spot."

"I aimed at his thigh," answered Singleton.

After an examination of the man Mr. Cowell shook his head.

"He's hit in a bad spot and is bleeding internally," he said. "I'm afraid he's as good as a dead man."



They laid him on the other mattress, which they removed to the other side of the room.

Mr. Cowell and the boys dressed themselves, and then the former went downstairs and got a flask of brandy.

This stimulant brought Monkton to his senses.

With the intuition of a mortally wounded man he seemed to realize that his course on earth was about run.

Clif grasped the chance to persuade him to make a full confession of his iniquity against Grantley Price and himself.

"How about Fleming?" he asked weakly. "Did he escape?"

"No. He has a broken leg and is our prisoner."

"What do you think of my chances?" he asked Mr. Cowell.

"The ball is in your abdomen and you are bleeding inwardly. There isn't a chance in a thousand for you to recover. If you have anything to say you will have to be quick about it, for I see that you are sinking fast."

"It's tough to have to die in the full flush of health," replied Monkton. "Who shot me? You, Clifford Price?"

"No. I fired at Mr. Fleming."

"Well, perhaps I'll stand a better chance in the next world by making a clean breast of everything," he said slowly and thoughtfully. "Put your hand in the pocket of my coat, young man. You will find there your father's original will. The one filed by Fleming in Macedonia is a forgery. Now take down what I tell you."

Mr. Cowell produced a pocket fountain pen and a memorandum book.

Monkton then confessed the whole conspiracy to defraud Clif, and stated what his share in the transaction had been.

He signed the book with an unsteady hand, and the others signed it as witnesses.

"I think I feel better after that," he said. "Do you forgive me, boy?"

"I do with all my heart," replied Clif, solemnly.

Monkton lingered till daylight and then died.

In the meantime Mr. Fleming was made as comfortable as possible.

Clif showed him Monkton's confession, and he saw that the game was up for good and all.

"I suppose you mean to prosecute me," he said, despondently.

"No, Mr. Fleming, not if you will add your confession to Monkton's. In that event you may go where you choose and take your son. If you do not prosper in three years send me your address and I will forward you a sum of

money to give you another start. I think I am treating you fairly."

Mr. Fleming admitted it and made a statement covering everything.

Next day Mr. Fleming and the body of Monkton were moved to Tucson.

During the week Mr. Cowell and the boys located the turquoise mine, but it was decided not to disturb it until Clif reached twenty-one and came into full possession of all his property.

Clif did not accompany Florence Cowell and her father to California, but returned with his chum to Macedonia to start the necessary legal proceedings that would establish his unquestioned right to his father's property.

In due time Mr. Stapleton was appointed his guardian and the Stapleton family removed to Beeching Hollow at Clif's request.

Clif decided not to go to a big college, but engage a private tutor for himself and Walter.

His education was practically completed to suit his own ideas when he reached his twenty-first birthday.

Then he and Walter went to Arizona and opened up the turquoise mine.

After taking out many thousand dollars worth of rough stones, Clif finally sold the ranch and mine to a corporation for a million dollars.

On his return East there were great doings at Beeching Hollow.

He and Walter had stopped over at Chicago, and when they left for Macedonia, Florence Cowell accompanied them as Clif's wife.

There was something of a celebration at the Hollow to welcome its new mistress, with music and fireworks galore.

Then the two young people settled down to a life of quiet wedded bliss.

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## THE END.

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